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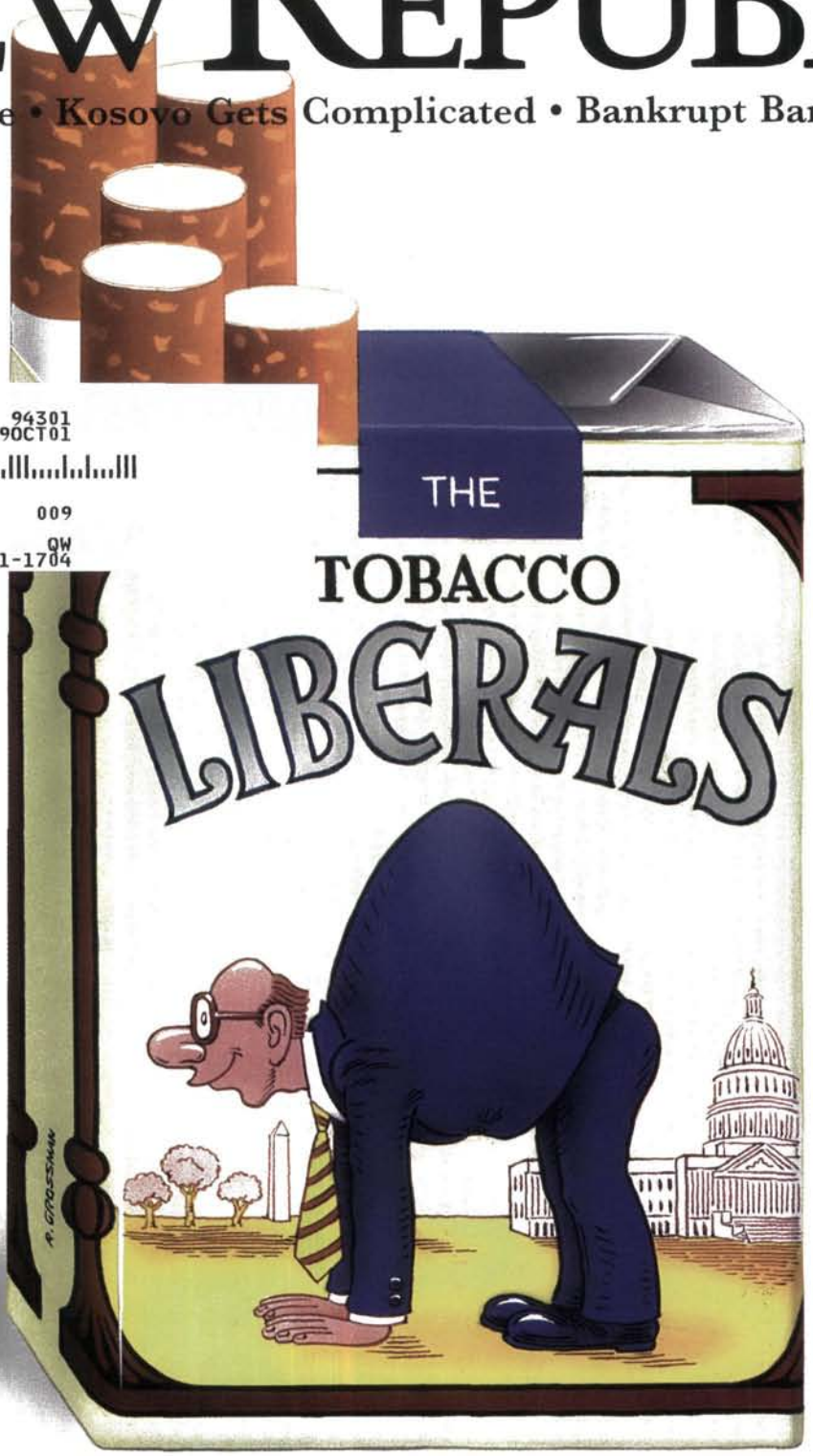

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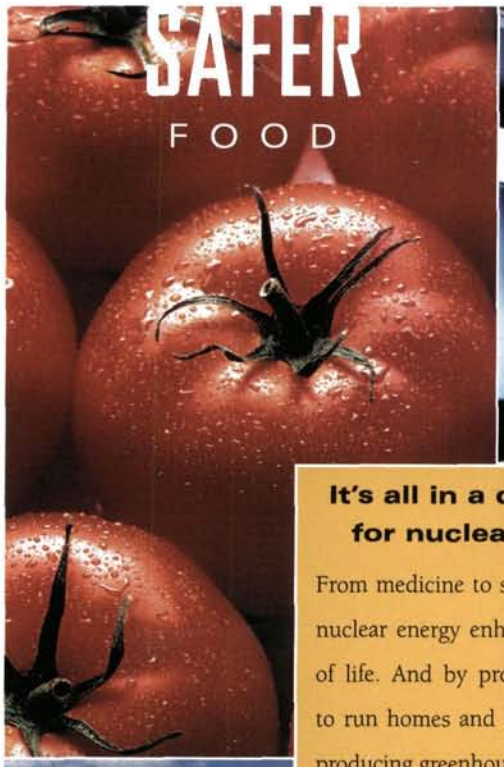

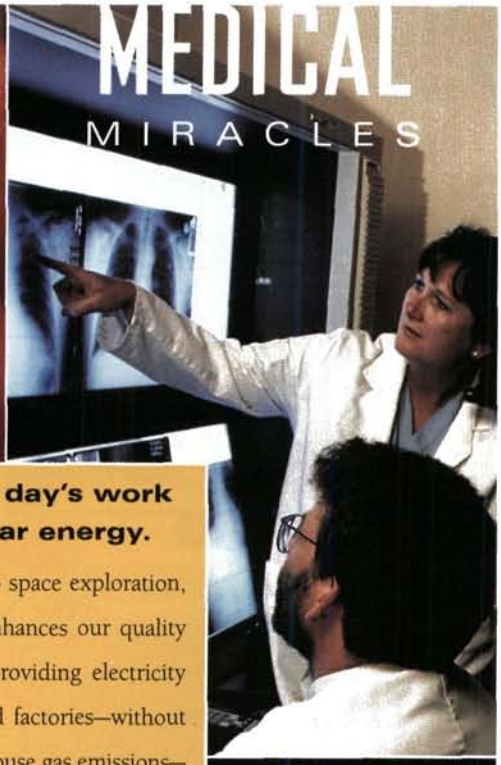

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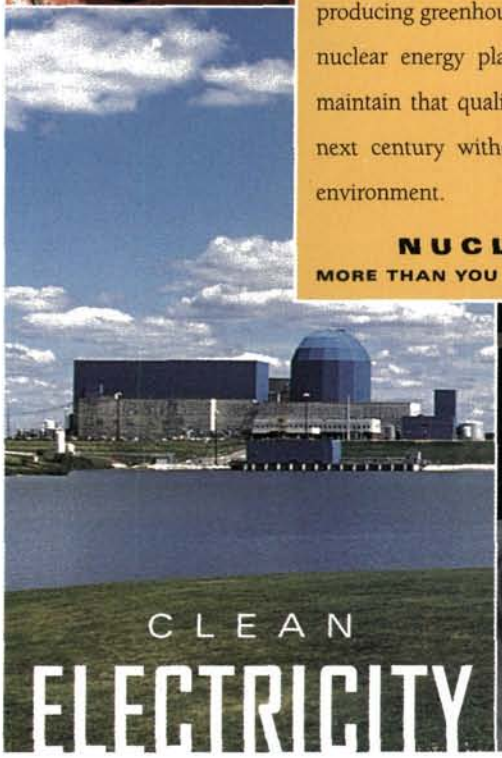

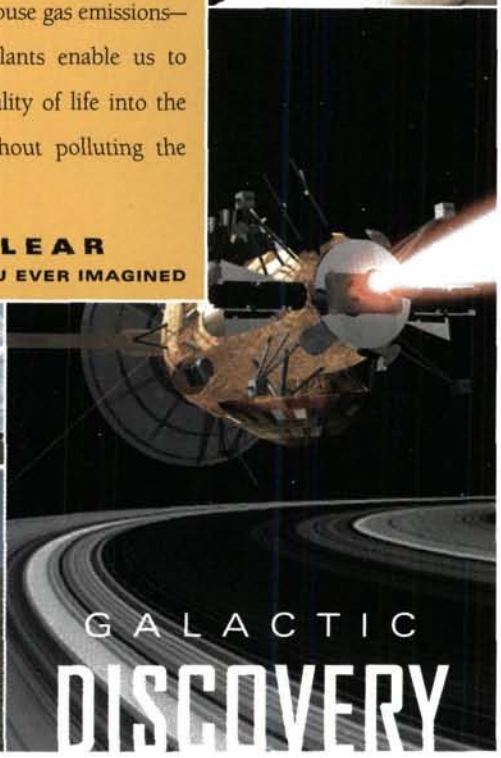

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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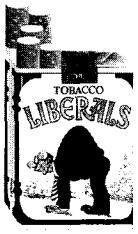

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CORRESPONDENCE

Berger battle

To the editors:

Jacob Heilbrunn ("Mr. Nice Guy," April 13) writes that national security adviser Samuel "Sandy" Berger "has left almost no paper trail on any foreign policy issue whether it's the Middle East or Europe."

Actually, Berger has left a small but significant trail. According to *The Jerusalem Post* (January 20, 1993), Berger has been "a financial contributor to Americans for Peace Now," the U.S. support group of the Israeli Peace Now movement. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the Peace Now line—criticizing Israel while almost never criticizing Yasir Arafat, insisting that Israel give more land to Arafat regardless of Arafat's violations of the Oslo accords, and favoring Israeli concessions on Jerusalem—is so similar to the Clinton administration's line.

HERBERT ZWEIBON
Chairman, Americans For a Safe Israel
New York, New York

To the editors:

Although flattered by Jacob Heilbrunn's conclusion that national security adviser Sandy Berger's views on the Vietnam War were significantly affected by my writings and lectures at Cornell, I regard it as unfair to Berger to assert that he partook of views I never held. Heilbrunn criticizes *The United States in Vietnam*, a book I coauthored, for having "depicted the North Vietnamese as nationalists rather than Communists." They were, of course, both, as American policymakers, who woefully underestimated the power of Vietnamese nationalism, failed to appreciate. Heilbrunn must have found it difficult to reconcile his criticism with the very first chapter of the book, where I describe Ho Chi Minh's Communist training and beliefs, while recognizing that for him "Vietnam always took first place over communism" and that "even Ngo Dinh Diem [Eisenhower's choice to lead the Saigon government] openly admitted that it was because of Ho's leadership as a nationalist that he was ultimately able to rally such wide Vietnamese support."

Equally unfounded is Heilbrunn's assertion that in this book I denied the North Vietnamese had "committed atrocities and [that I] praised ruthless collectivization policies as a 'more moderate system' of agrarian reform that 'helped win back the peasants' allegiance to the central government.' " To arrive at this specious rendering he fuses together my treatment of two distinct phases of agrarian reorganization into a spurious amalgam that mocks history.

The initial phase of the agrarian reorganization in 1956, I wrote, was one which "called for dispossession and repression of landlords whose plots were often scarcely sufficient to provide a living for themselves and their families" and observed that many of these were "indiscriminately brought to trial" and "killed." In reaction, I wrote, "peasant resentment erupted into full-fledged uprisings" and continued: "As a consequence, both [the Party Secretary General] and the Minister of Agriculture were forced to resign," and Ho Chi Minh then "personally took charge of the agricultural program. A more moderate system of agrarian reorganization was then

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LET'S MAKE A DEAL
Is Sandy Berger's Foreign Policy a Little Too Friendly?
By Jacob Heilbrunn

introduced ... [that] helped win back the peasants' allegiance to the central government." It was from my description of this later reformed system that Heilbrunn extracts phrases that he so disingenuously joins with my description of the excesses of the first period.

I would hope that Heilbrunn does not so blatantly misrepresent the writings of others who he claims influenced Berger as he has mine.

GEORGE MCT. KAHIN
Ithaca, New York

Jacob Heilbrunn replies:

George McT. Kahin is at it again. Vietnam—i.e., nationalism—did not take precedence over communism for Ho and his henchmen. The truth is that, for a totalitarian like Ho, Vietnam simply served as an instrument to carry out his murderous dream of a utopian society. First the communists carried out terror against landowners, then they proceeded to collectivize the peasantry—what Kahin calls a "moderate" reform. So the notion that Ho restrained his colleagues from radical measures is laughable, similar to praising Stalin for ending the campaign that resulted in the Ukrainian famine when he declared the country "dizzy with success."

With regard to Herbert Zweibon's contention: Sandy Berger has never been a member of Americans for Peace Now. The organization's records show that he contributed $15 in 1989.

Arguing inequality

To the editors:

We're pleased that Glenn C. Loury thinks our analysis of income disparities has become the "conventional wisdom" ("Unequalized," April 6). Would that it were so.

Loury insinuates that we deny that a problem of economic inequality between the races "even exists in the first place." The charge is absurd. But we disagree with Loury on the reasons for that inequality.

He maintains that black workers "continue to do worse than equally skilled whites" and offers a few statistics showing that African American men earned less than whites with similar amounts of schooling. And yet he concedes that the proper index of educational attainment is not time spent in school but what has been learned as measured by test scores. He cites one study, while unaccountably overlooking the findings of *four* others that came to a different conclusion. Indeed, two found black men earning substantially *more* than white men with comparable test scores. These findings are summarized in our book, *America in Black and White*, and Loury can hardly plead ignorance of them.

The evidence of a close link between black poverty and family structure is likewise dismissed. But black married-couple families earn just 13 percent less than white married-couple families, and that gap would undoubtedly be smaller if blacks had equal college-graduation rates and fewer lived in the South (where average wages are lower). When six out of seven black children living in poverty reside with only one parent, the connection between poverty and family structure seems impossible to deny. Robert Lerman's solid analysis in the May 1996 *Economica* indicates, contrary to the president's Council of Economic Advisers, that the entire rise in child poverty among both blacks and whites can be attributed to declining marriage rates.

Moreover, no serious student of family patterns today denies the overwhelming evidence showing that children who grow up in single-parent families do

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much less well in school, drop out at an earlier age, and are more likely to have children out of wedlock and to get in trouble with the law.

STEPHAN AND ABIGAIL THERNSTROM
Lexington, Massachusetts

Glenn C. Loury replies:

Oh, I see. We've got a problem alright—it's the blacks. If they'd get smarter, and live better, racial inequality would virtually disappear. And, if the best economists in the country say otherwise, let's hunt through our pile of studies until we find confirmation for our ideological position. Ugh!

Back to school

To the editors:

There is much more to the history of homeschooling ("School's Out," April 6) than the "first it was the Christians, now it's mainstream people doing it" line parroted by Katherine Pfleger and much of the rest of the media. The true story is that homeschooling is a direct outgrowth of the free-school/alternative-school movement of the '60s and '70s and was never the sole province of any group.

PATRICK FARENGA
Publisher, Growing Without Schooling
Cambridge, Massachusetts

To the editors:

Katherine Pfleger expressed concern at the taxpayer expense incurred in bringing a formerly home-educated student up to speed. How many other students are in remedial classes at that same school because public education failed to do its job?

LINDA OPP
Vancouver, Washington

Cross-examination

To the editors:

Charles Lane's observations on the racial biases inherent in traditional commercial standardized-test coaching couldn't be more on point ("Exam Question," April 13). But the solution doesn't require government intervention. Our Boston-area test-prep firm charges need-based "sliding scale" tuition for our LSAT course. Although our policy is race-blind, the result has been classes that look more like America: twelve percent African American, ten percent Latino, 15 percent East Asian, four percent South Asian. Despite its accessible fee structure, our "LSAT 180" course gives our students an average increase of over nine points, more than competitive with the results of the more expensive courses named in his

continued on page 41

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Shimon Peres
and Robert Littell

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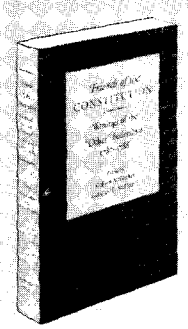
Edited by Colleen A. Sheehan and Gary L. McDowell



Though *The Federalist Papers* are rightly renowned as a primary exposition of the principles and purposes of the proposed United States Constitution, there were many writers other than John Jay, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton who in 1787 and 1788 argued for the Constitution's ratification. Indeed, as Herbert J. Storing, Jr. once observed, "[t]hese 'other' Federalist writings carried the main burden of the public defense of the proposed Constitution... [and] several of them were vastly more influential than *The Federalist*." In a collection that is certain to make a major contribution to our understanding of the American Founding, *Friends of the Constitution* brings together forty-nine of the most important of these "other" Federalists' writings. Included are the original texts of pamphlets, speeches, and other proratification writings of George Washington, Benjamin Rush, Nicholas Collin, John Dickinson, James Wilson, Tench Coxe, Benjamin Franklin, Noah Webster, Roger Sherman, Fisher Ames, Peletiah Webster, Samuel Tenny, Stephen Hopkins, Oliver Ellsworth, and David Ramsay. Seperately they address the underlying themes of the historic Federalist/Anti-Federalist debate: "The Necessity of Union," "Energetic but Limited Government," and "Popular Government and Civic Virtue." The text includes Storing's important assessment of these writings, and the volume includes citations to Storing's monumental seven-volume *Complete Anti-Federalist*.

Colleen A. Sheehan is professor of Political Science at Villanova University.
Gary L. McDowell is director of the Institute of United States Studies, University of London.

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FROM WASHINGTON

Wrong Roth

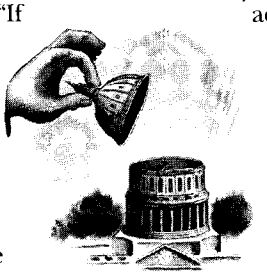
Have you set up a Roth IRA yet? If you haven't, it can't be for lack of marketing effort by the financial services industry. Since January 1, when the new tax-free savings accounts became available, every other piece of junk mail at my house has been a Roth IRA come-on from a bank or brokerage. The personal-finance magazines are filled with articles about this "revolutionary" way to save.

Permit me to rain a little skepticism on the revolution. I have no idea whether the Roth IRA is the appropriate savings vehicle for you and your family—as they say in *Money*. I do, however, doubt that this tasty new tax break will accomplish any meaningful public policy objective. Indeed, there are only two things we can say for sure about the Roth IRA's economic impact. First, it is going to cost the U.S. Treasury $20 billion over the next ten years (according to the Joint Committee on Taxation). And, second, the vast majority of this subsidy will wind up in the pockets of high-income Americans.

Like a "traditional" IRA, all interest, dividends, or capital gains earned on the $2,000 per year you're allowed to invest in a Roth IRA accumulate (and compound) tax free. But, whereas you must pay taxes when you cash in your traditional IRA at the age of 59½, all withdrawals from the Roth IRA are tax-free. Also, in a Roth IRA, you can keep your money in as long as you want after you turn 59½, so it keeps on compounding tax free. (A traditional IRA requires you to cash out at 70½—no pun intended.) After your Roth IRA is five years old, you may withdraw money to pay for college or for catastrophic medical expenses, or even to make a $10,000 down payment on a first home—again, tax and penalty free.

In a recent interview published on the Fidelity Investments website (where else?), Senator William Roth, the Delaware Republican who invented this sweet deal, promised that the Roth IRA would lead to a "tremendous" increase in the U.S. savings rate—something he called "critical" to our economic future. But, judging by the promotional literature from Fidelity, Charles Schwab, and the rest, Roth has wildly oversold the impact of his new IRA on savings. The financial services industry's biggest push is not to enlist new IRA savers but rather to "convert" the $1.3 trillion worth of savings currently tied up in traditional IRAs to the more lucrative Roth IRAs. To the extent they succeed, the country's pool of savings won't grow; it will just slosh around from place to place.

Which is more or less what happened with traditional IRAs. Generally speaking, IRAs give people a tax break for engaging in economic behavior they would have found rational anyway: i.e., putting money away for their Golden Years. As former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker once observed: "If you give people a tax-exempt way to save, they will choose the tax-exempt way instead of the taxable way, but it doesn't seem to do much for the overall savings rate."



The U.S. savings rate was 9.4 percent of Gross National Product in 1981, when the IRA was introduced. It is less than four percent today. You can say savings would have been even lower without the IRA. But you can't say the IRA "revolutionized" anything. Moreover, when the government gave up billions of dollars in tax revenues to establish IRAs, it had to replace the lost cash by raising taxes on other economic activity or by borrowing. That is, it had to dip into the pool of savings that would otherwise have been available for the private sector. Now, thanks to the Roth IRA, the government will have to raid the private economy for another $20 billion over the next decade.

As *Money* decorously puts it: The Roth IRA is "most appropriate for the young and affluent." It's a boon for the rich for two reasons. First, all tax deductions benefit the rich disproportionately because, the higher your tax bracket, the bigger your tax cut. Second, because it is a tax break for savings, the Roth IRA benefits most those who have extra money to save. In theory, it's available to all income classes. In practice, the paycheck-to-paycheck crowd need not apply.

The Roth IRA also suffers from a confusion of policy objectives. Is the purpose of the new law to encourage savings, as the senator told Fidelity's website? Or is it, as he said in the same interview, to "encourage particularly your younger citizens to buy homes"—as if middle-class home-buying weren't already heavily subsidized by federal tax policy? Or does the Roth IRA's provisions for tax-free medical and college tuition savings make it a prototype of the medical and tuition savings accounts (a version of which just passed the Senate) that Republicans tout as a substitute for Medicare and student loans? Combined with the recent capital gains cuts, these new tax-free savings vehicles are putting the country on a slippery slope toward an income tax system that affects only wages and salaries. This would be highly regressive, since the rich receive the vast majority of nonwage income—interest, dividends, and capital gains.

Of course, the biggest winners from the Roth IRA are financial services firms, estate planners, accountants, and everyone else who makes a living advising people how to keep the government away from their money. Indeed, the Roth IRA adds so much complexity to the tax code that even the smartest investors will probably need to pay for professional advice. (My favorite Roth IRA gimmick is the $9.95 "IRA Analyzer" CD-ROM from T. Rowe Price.) Every dollar Americans spend figuring out how to shuffle their money from a taxable savings vehicle to a Roth IRA is a dollar that can't be invested to expand the capacity of the economy to produce other goods and services.

And what's all the fuss about savings anyway? In his interview with Fidelity, Senator Roth tried to raise the old Japan bugaboo as a justification for the Roth IRA. "We're now in a global economy," he warned. "Japan has tremendous savings. Admittedly, right now they're having some difficult problems, but they'll come back." But, if anything, Japan may be having "difficult problems"—namely, economic meltdown—because of its national mania for savings, not in spite of it. The Japanese experience suggests that it's not how much you save but how you invest that counts. Japanese business has made huge misinvestments partly because savings were so abundant—and therefore cheap—that there was little incentive to use them wisely. In this sense, the low U.S. savings rate may actually enhance the performance of the private economy. Or so the current American boom, fueled by low interest rates, would seem to suggest.

It's pointless to use the tax code to shift savings from one corner of the economy to the other. Government can best encourage private sector efficiency by drawing up rules that treat all forms of economic activity—and all forms of income—equally. Once government establishes a level playing field, the marketplace will work its magic, allocating resources according to the real demands of households and firms, as opposed to the preferences of politicians. You'd think a Republican would understand that.

CHARLES LANE

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MAY 18, 1998

TAX TALES

Bashing the Internal Revenue Service worked well for the Republicans last fall—so well, in fact, that they're doing it again. This week, Senator William Roth of Delaware convened another round of Finance Committee hearings on nefarious abuses by the government's tax collectors. Among the more sensational tales were stories about an IRS manager who stole 20 automobiles from the service, an IRS agent who egregiously abused travel-expense privileges, and a Texas oilman who was the subject of a highly publicized raid by 64 armed and—judging by their hostile dispositions—very dangerous agents. "It is unacceptable for a United States government agency to carry on its business in the manner we have found," Roth thundered. "It is my hope that exposure of these problems will help bring about swift corrective action."

And swift the corrective action was. On Tuesday, the administration announced it was appointing William Webster, former chief of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to lead a probe of the IRS Criminal Investigation Division. Roth hailed that appointment as an important step in the right direction, but, of course, he has much broader goals in mind. As early as next week, the Senate will vote on a bill to overhaul the IRS. Like a similar version passed in the House, it would shift the burden of proof in audits from the taxpayer to the government, while also creating an eleven-member IRS advisory board, composed almost entirely of private-sector executives, with broad oversight powers.

The White House, which initially opposed the House bill (because, among other things, it would put control of a government agency in the hands of CEOs with conflicts of interest), has since signaled its support. If there were any lingering doubts as to whether the bill would actually pass, the headlines from this week's hearings have erased them. When the new law is finally on the books, momentum will surely carry the Republicans to their next, even bigger, cause: overhaul of the tax code itself and the imposition of a highly regressive flat tax or national sales tax.

And why not? Who, after all, could listen to the horrors from the Roth committee and still defend the IRS? Well, it turns out that these hearings are a replay of their previous incarnation in more ways than one. After the last round of hearings, it became clear that some of the testimony was not quite what it seemed. The IRS had been powerless to defend itself against many allegations, because confidentiality laws prevent it from discussing tax cases unless the individuals involved sign waivers. And—surprise!—a lot of the people making allegations refused to sign waivers. In addition, while the IRS was indeed going after more low-income taxpayers, it was doing so because that's what the Republican Congress wanted—in order to clamp down on fraud in the earned income tax credit program. Finally, last week, the Treasury Department inspector general's office released a report on some of the most damaging allegations, which were made by an agent still in the IRS's employ. According to the report, many of the charges could not be substantiated.

In much the same way, there is less to the latest horror stories than meets the eye. The IRS agent who stole 20 cars actually stole two, as a Treasury Department official pointed out later in testimony. (The erroneous figure was the number of cars for which the IRS could not initially account.) The agency was slow to react, but, when it did, it meted out punishment. It forced the agent to pay back the value of the vehicles—$20,000—and would have fired him had he not resigned first. The egregious travel abuse by another agent actually involved the inappropriate use of frequent-flier coupon tickets—not admirable, but hardly the stuff of a Senate hearing. And that Texas oilman? The armed assault by IRS agents was clearly excessive. (And the embarrassing publicity it produced was quite probably unfair.) But, when all was said and done, the magnate did agree to pay the IRS a settlement of $23 million.

The oilman says he paid the money just to get the agency off his back. As with all the IRS horror stories, it's hard to know exactly where the truth lies. The only way to know for sure would be to scrutinize each case. But guess what? The Republicans have gone out of their way, just as they did in the fall, to prevent anybody from examining their evidence too closely. Before the hearings began, Democrats asked Roth for lists of witnesses and permission to interrogate them; the lists arrived the night before. Democrats also requested permission to put up their own witnesses; Roth said no.

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The real problem with anecdotal testimony, however, is that anecdotes do not necessarily equal trends. Sure, the IRS has its rogues. But so do lots of state agencies. So do lots of Fortune 500 companies. Indeed, go to any large organization, in the public or the private sector, and you'll find individuals who act boorishly, unethically, or even illegally. Does that mean all of these organizations are fundamentally flawed? You don't overhaul—or abolish—a critical institution like the IRS absent evidence that the problems are truly systemic, and the Roth hearings, despite all their bluster, have failed to provide compelling evidence of that nature.

None of which is to say the IRS could not do its job better. There's plenty of room for improvement, particularly when it comes to internal communications, technology, and taxpayer service. It might even be true that the agency's culture encourages some forms of abuse. But the chief impediment to reform is too little steady, sustained management, which is caused, in turn, by too much congressional meddling. The proposed IRS overhaul would, if anything, make the situation worse, by confusing the lines of authority and tying the agency's hands further. It would limit the agency's ability to do its job—namely, collect taxes—while further discrediting the very idea of an income tax itself. Could this be precisely what the IRS-bashers have in mind? •

NOTEBOOK

UNSCOM WATCH, V: Saddam Hussein spent much of the last week presiding over a lavish nationwide celebration of his sixty-first birthday. The joyful celebrations included massive parades, a day of special TV programming devoted to Saddam, newspaper articles, free birthday cake for scores of Iraqis, and the unveiling of a giant statue of Saddam mounted on a white Arabian thoroughbred. For its part, the United Nations Security Council marked the occasion by voting to continue sanctions on Iraq based on the fact that Saddam still hasn't fessed up about all of his chemical and biological weapons. Arms inspector Richard Butler announced that a cache of mustard-gas weapons—which Iraq had variously claimed were destroyed or no longer chemically active—are still, in fact, quite deadly. As *The New York Times* reported, Butler was greeted by hostile interrogation from the Russian and Chinese delegates to the Security Council. The latter diplomatically referred to UNSCOM as "an army of occupation." Indeed, Russia arranged for Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammed al-Sahaf to make his country's case in a speech to the Security Council. Al-Sahaf also told the world once again that, as far as Iraq is concerned, the weapons inspections of Saddam's palaces will not be open-ended as called for in the agreement reached by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in February. "If they need for any reason, maybe there would be a subsequent visit but that's all," al-Sahaf told reporters. In addition, the U.N. may have handed Saddam a birthday present after all: In a sop to Russia that the Clinton administration declined to veto, the Security Council decided to abandon its current procedure of voting on Iraqi sanctions every six months. Henceforth, it will return to voting every 60 days, which means Iraq can mount the same propaganda show every two months from now on. Was this what Saddam wished for when the 22 million candles Iraqis lit for his birthday were blown out?

CONQUERED COALITION: The Concord Coalition may be the only group in America that has something to lose from the current federal budget surplus. Until now, its mission has been to alarm the populace about the menace of uncontrolled deficits. But, when the deficit threat began to fade, the Concord Coalition could at least shift to ringing the alarms about the looming bankruptcy of Social Security. The program's trustees released their annual report last week, and the coalition immediately sprang into action. In a press release entitled "LATEST SOCIAL SECURITY TRUSTEES REPORT HIGHLIGHTS URGENT NEED FOR ACTION," the coalition once again bemoaned the bad news. "Today's report of the Social Security trustees should serve as a wake-up call for those who would like to delay reform efforts," declared Executive Director Martha Phillips. There's just one problem: The trustees actually had *good* news this year. Thanks to the recent economic boom, the Social Security trust fund should remain solvent for three more years than previously projected. Eventually, the mass retirement of the baby-boom generation will force some hard choices on the system, and it's best to make those tough decisions now, while the trust fund is still flush. But there's no way the trustees' report has made reform literally *more* urgent. To the contrary: A cool-headed reading of the report would be that we now have the luxury of a few extra years in which to debate all the various Social Security reform proposals as thoroughly as they deserve. But cool-headedness is not exactly the Concord Coalition's stock in trade.

CHAFEE'S KIDS: In a similar spirit, Republican Senator John Chafee on Wednesday hailed a report by the Center for the Child Care Workforce on the problem of low pay for day-care center workers. "More than anything, the results of this study are a clarion call for Congress to debate, vote on, and enact comprehensive, bipartisan legislation," Chafee said. "The bill I have introduced—the Caring for Children Act—gets us started in the right direction and is a carefully balanced approach." However, Chafee was less detailed in his praise for the report's main policy finding: Chafee's approach—giving parents a tax deduction for child-care expenditures—is a less effective way to promote quality day-care than directly subsidizing the pathetically low wages too many child-care workers still receive. •

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Sweden Cuts Tobacco Tax By 27% In Bid To Curb Smugglers.

Source: Financial Times, Wednesday, April 15, 1998.

OTHER COUNTRIES GET IT. WHEN WILL OURS?

Sweden is learning, as Canada did a few years ago, that massive taxes on tobacco products can create a black market. Some experts believe the U.S. may be about to learn the same lesson. Washington is getting ready to raise the price of tobacco products so high, it would create a black market and provide our children with unregulated access to cheaper tobacco products.

According to the Fraternal Order of Police, legislation now being considered "will have the net effect of increasing the number of criminals on the streets, undercutting the achievements of law enforcement in this country, and exploding the ranks and profits of organized crime."

How did this happen? Politicians were aided and abetted by some typical Washington accounting.

The federal government wants you to believe their legislation will only increase the cost of a pack of cigarettes by $1.10. But Washington isn't telling you about the hidden costs, retail and wholesale markups, state taxes and other factors that independent Wall Street analysts say would raise the price by more than $2.50. That would put the real price of cigarettes up to $5.00 a pack.

Why should you care? Because a huge tax increase not only gives kids unregulated access to a black market, it also raises taxes for those least able to afford it and destroys hundreds of thousands of jobs around the country.

If you're concerned that Washington hasn't learned from Sweden's lesson, call 1 800-343-3222 and tell Congress how you feel.

Philip Morris Incorporated • R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company
Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation
Lorillard Tobacco Company • United States Tobacco Company

www.tobaccoresolution.com

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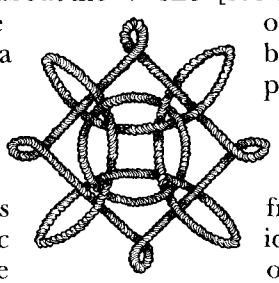
CHARLES II

By Glenn C. Loury

"For many years now, too many scholars on left and right alike have pretended they live in a Lake Wobegon world where everyone can be above average. It is time for policy analysts to stop avoiding the reality of human inequality, a reality that neither equalization of opportunity nor a freer market will circumvent."

So concludes a thin monograph just published by the American Enterprise Institute under the title *Income Inequality and IQ*. The author? You guessed it, Charles Murray, who, along with the late Richard Herrnstein, wrote the incendiary 1994 bestseller *The Bell Curve*. Murray is back on message—chastened perhaps, but unrepentant. While studiously avoiding any claims about the innate intellectual inferiority of blacks this time around, he is still preaching his gospel about a social hierarchy based on sheer mental candlepower. He still claims that inherited human differences dictate disparities of income so stubborn that we can have a more equal society only if we tolerate government intrusions that would surely curtail liberty. "No realistic assessment of our empirical experience," he declares, "can yield grounds for concluding that our repertoire of social interventions, augmented with greater funding and energy, may be expected to narrow the national income inequality statistics."



I like that "our"—Murray having never met a "social intervention" he much cared for. But never mind. The fact is that "our empirical experience" compels no such categorical judgment. Murray persists in making sweeping claims of the sort that were effectively rebutted years ago, while ignoring the most serious criticisms of his earlier work. One cannot imagine his coauthor, Richard Herrnstein, who had been a respected professor of psychology at Harvard before his untimely death, behaving in so unscholarly a fashion. Indeed, one wonders whether Murray, who has never shown mastery of statistical technique in his work (his gift is exposition), has a sufficient grasp of the methodological issues involved to engage in an expert discourse.

Certainly, *Income Inequality and IQ* does nothing to dispel this suspicion. The monograph uses a subsample of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, consisting of matched pairs of siblings raised in the same households. The survey looks, first, at how these siblings fared on cognitive skills tests that they took when they were in their late adolescence. It then looks at how those siblings do in their late 20s and early 30s—that is, how much money they earn, how much education they receive, how much job prestige they gain. Murray uses these data to establish a causal relationship: By comparing persons with middling test scores to siblings whose scores were either much better or much worse, Murray finds that, among youngsters raised in the same household, those who did better on the cognitive test were substantially more successful later in life. Ergo, he says, innate cognitive differences explain inequality.

Of course, the story is a lot more complicated than that. Nobody disputes that people with better mental skills will, on average, perform better in our society. And, yes, this view is rather more broadly accepted now than it had been before the appearance of *The Bell Curve*. But Murray still hasn't managed to answer the academic community's chief complaint: His theory does not adequately account for the role social environment plays in determining one's lot in life.

As you may recall, in *The Bell Curve* Herrnstein and Murray used an extremely crude measure of social background, then contrasted its effects with those of a test of mental skills given to most of the sample in late adolescence. Murray claims his new study answers this criticism: "*The Bell Curve*'s method of controlling for SES [socioeconomic status] and the sibling method of controlling for everything in the family background yield interpretations of the independent role of IQ on income that are substantively indistinguishable," he writes. But the test Murray uses, the Armed Forces Qualification Test, is not an environment-free measure of intelligence, so it does not identify "the independent role of IQ." Scores on the AFQT have been shown to vary significantly with the quantity and quality of education to which a young person has been exposed.

Moreover, comparing siblings, while helpful, does not come close to "controlling for everything in the family background." Environments can differ within families, too—because of differences in the sex, personality, or birth order of the children, for example. In any case, Murray's conclusion—that improving the environments of unrelated children will do little to reduce inequality—is a non sequitur. Finding a correlation between intelligence and success *within* families says nothing about the extent to which inequality in a population is driven by differences *between* families. After all, incomes are much more equal among siblings than among unrelated individuals, which attests to the equality-enhancing effects of a common family environment. Variance in IQ explains at most one-fifth of the variance of incomes; so, most inequality is caused by other factors. It is by now well-established that, holding ability constant, more education raises earnings, and well-designed, early childhood interventions can improve later-life outcomes for disadvantaged youths in a cost-effective way. But Murray seems utterly unfazed by these results.

Several months after *The Bell Curve* appeared, the Uni-

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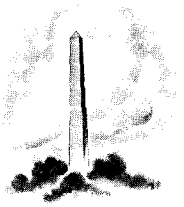
versity of Chicago arranged a workshop in which Murray was to face one of his most distinguished critics, the renowned econometrician James Heckman, in a discussion on the technical merits of his work. Murray backed out of that engagement. "I am canceling out of the session," he wrote to the organizer. "My experience of the last few months leads me to this position.... I will no longer deal with academics in groups." A few weeks later, Murray appeared at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, before a rather large group of academics, to debate a nonspecialist under a strictly regulated format. Murray obviously prefers nonexpert audiences that can't ask him overly technical questions. Is it any wonder why? •

WASHINGTON SCENE

HACK HEAVEN

By Stephen Glass

Ian Restil, a 15-year-old computer hacker who looks like an even more adolescent version of Bill Gates, is throwing a tantrum. "I want more money. I want a Miata. I want a trip to Disney World. I want *X-Man* comic [book] number one. I want a lifetime subscription to *Playboy*, and throw in *Penthouse*. Show me the money! Show me the money!" Over and over again, the boy, who is wearing a frayed Cal Ripken Jr. T-shirt, is shouting his demands. Across the table, executives from a California software firm called Jukt Micronics are listening—and trying ever so delicately to oblige. "Excuse me, sir," one of the suits says, tentatively, to the pimply teenager. "Excuse me. Pardon me for interrupting you, sir. We can arrange more money for you. Then, you can buy the [comic] book, and then, when you're of more, say, appropriate age, you can buy the car and pornographic magazines on your own."



It's pretty amazing that a 15-year-old could get a big-time software firm to grovel like that. What's more amazing, though, is how Ian got Jukt's attention—by breaking into its databases. In March, Restil—whose nom de plume is "Big Bad Bionic Boy"—used a computer at his high school library to hack into Jukt. Once he got past the company's online security system, he posted every employee's salary on the company's website alongside more than a dozen pictures of naked women, each with the caption: "THE BIG BAD BIONIC BOY HAS BEEN HERE BABY." After weeks of trying futilely to figure out how Ian cracked the security program, Jukt's engineers gave up. That's when the company came to Ian's Bethesda, Maryland, home—to hire him.

And Ian, clever boy that he is, had been expecting them. "The principal told us to hire a defense lawyer fast, because Ian was in deep trouble," says his mother, Jamie Restil. "Ian laughed and told us to get an agent. Our boy was definitely right." Ian says he knew that Jukt would determine it was cheaper to hire him—and pay him to fix their database—than it would be to have engineers do it. And he knew this because the same thing had happened to more than a dozen online friends.

Indeed, deals like Ian's are becoming common—so common, in fact, that hacker agents now advertise their commissions on websites. *Computer Insider*, a newsletter for hackers, estimates that about 900 recreational hackers were hired in the last four years by companies they once targeted. Ian's agent, whose business card is emblazoned with the slogan "super-agent to super-nerds," claims to represent nearly 300 of them, ages nine to 68. A failed basketball agent, Joe Hiert got into the industry when one of his son's friends, 21-year-old Ty Harris, broke into an Internet security firm three years ago and came to him for advice. The software maker paid Harris $1 million, a monster truck, and promised "free agency"—meaning he can quit and work for a competitor at any time.

Of course, a cynic might say hacker schemes look an awful lot like protection rackets. *That's an awfully nice computer network you got there. It'd be a shame if somebody broke into it....* Law-enforcement officials, in particular, complain that deals between companies and their online predators have made prosecution of online security breaches impossible. "We are basically paralyzed right now," explains Jim Ghort, who directs the Center for Interstate Online Investigations, a joint police project of 18 states. "We can't arrest or prosecute most hackers, because corporate victims are refusing to come forward. This is a huge problem."

In March, Nevada law-enforcement officials got so desperate they ran the following radio advertisement: "Would you hire a shoplifter to watch the cash register? Please don't deal with hackers." The state took to the airwaves shortly after a hacker broke into a regional department store's computer system and instructed it to credit his Visa card about $500 per day. According to Nevada officials, the boy racked up more than $32,000 in credit before he was caught—but the store wouldn't press charges. It let him keep the money, then threw in a $1,500 shopping spree—all in exchange for showing them how to improve their security.

Little wonder, then, that 21 states are now considering versions of something called the Uniform Computer Security Act, which would effectively criminalize immunity deals between hackers and companies—while imposing stiff penalties on the corporations who make such deals. "This is just like prostitution," says Julie Farthwork of the anti-hacker Computer Security Center, which helped draft the legislation. "As a society, we don't want people making a career out of something that's simply immoral."

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Not surprisingly, hackers hate the proposed legislation. They see themselves as "freelance security investigators," and they even have their own group—the National Assembly of Hackers—to lobby against the new law. "Really, hackers have to put in a lot of sunk costs before they find the one that's broken and get paid," says Frank Juliet, the group's president. "So, it's definitely a large community service that we are doing."

Less predictable, however, is the opposition of companies that have been hacked. It seems they don't like the proposed law, either, because they're worried they'll be stuck with no legal way to patch holes in their security systems. The Association of Internet-based Businesses has actually formed a task force with the National Assembly of Hackers to lobby against the law.

It remains to be seen who will win, but, until new laws are passed, hackers like Ian Restil will continue to enjoy a certain exalted status—particularly among their peers. At a conference sponsored by the National Assembly of Hackers last week, teenage hackers and graying corporate executives flocked to Ian, patting him on the back and giving him high-fives. "We're so proud of him," said Ian's mother. "He's doing such good things, and he's so smart and kind." At the formal dinner that followed, the emcee explained that Ian had just signed a contract for $81,000 in scholarship money—and a collection of rare comic books. The audience applauded wildly. Then, Ian stood on his chair and took a bow. He announced that he had hacked into a new company and frozen their bank account temporarily. "And now they're going to show me the money," he said, swirling his hips and shaking his fists. "I want a Miata. I want a trip to Disney World...." •

ON THE HILL

HOUSEBROKEN

By David Grann

On a recent Wednesday night, as most congressional staffers were finishing their work, four of Dan Burton's aides on the Government Reform and Oversight Committee were just beginning their biggest chore. Carrying eight heavy chunks of corkboard, a box of photos, and tape, they headed into Rayburn House Office Building Room 2154, where, the next day, several dozen distinguished members of Congress would sit for a hearing on alleged illegal foreign campaign contributions. On one side of the room, the aides taped piece after piece of painted corkboard together until their vision materialized: a mock stone wall measuring six feet by 20 feet. Next came the photos—big glossy shots of Democratic contributors who had fled the country or invoked the Fifth Amendment after being subpoenaed by the committee. In the middle, the staffers saved a special spot for the biggest photo, a picture of President Clinton. "It's perfect," thought one aide. And, indeed, in the quiet of the evening, the wall seemed like just the thing to jump-start a probe that, after six months and more than $2 million, had yet to confirm any of the allegations against the president and, according to members on both sides of the aisle, had become a parody of the democratic process.

But then the hearing began. Eyeing the wall, Democratic Representative Paul Kanjorski of Pennsylvania asked for a point of information: "Is this evidence of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and [if not] who is paying for it?"

"You can research that," Burton muttered—which several Democratic aides vowed to do. Trying to refocus the hearing on the important business at hand—whether to grant immunity to four individuals in exchange for their testimony—the Indiana Republican pointed to his creation and declared: "There has never been a congressional investigation that has faced this kind of stonewall.... Look again at that wall! I call it a wall of shame!"

I sat in the back of the hearing room, looking at the wall; in the light of day, it seemed more like something from an Ed Wood set. I had come not for any noble journalistic purpose but rather to witness for myself what had become the equivalent of a congressional car accident—something to gawk at on the way to work—and to glimpse what might happen if Congress actually tried to impeach the president. The committee's few public hearings had become legendary not for their substance but for their sideshows. Last October, for instance, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Republican from Florida, broke out in a ditty, to the tune of "Copacabana":

His name was Jorge.
Jorge Cabrera.
They say he ran a little coke
and he had good cigars to smoke....

That same day, someone from the Democratic National Committee paraded through Rayburn dressed as a pumpkin, wearing buttons that said "don't shoot" in honor of Burton's other great prop: a "headlike" object, which the former insurance salesman had plugged with a bullet in his backyard to determine whether Vince Foster was murdered. Even before that, things had already deteriorated: The committee had accidentally subpoenaed citizens whose only crime was that they had Asian last names; the chief Republican counsel had quit, citing his colleagues' unprofessional conduct; and Speaker Newt Gingrich had assigned new members to the committee simply to keep an eye on Burton, who was being investigated by the Justice Department for allegedly shaking down a lobbyist for campaign contributions. His minders didn't seem to help: Two weeks ago, in an interview with *The Indianapolis Star*, Burton called the president of the United States a "scumbag." In response, Democrat Henry Waxman, with his black

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mustache and bookish spectacles, was now calling the chairman's recent conduct "vile" and "reprehensible" and demanding an investigation of the investigator. "Mr. Chairman," he said, "in listening to your statement, there are so many mistakes, inventions of facts, untruths, I really don't know what to make of it.... It seems to me your whole thought process is unraveling."

Staring forlornly at his wall, Burton refused to apologize. Then, as the panel's other members debated the etymology of "scumbag," four schoolgirls in red baseball caps sat down in the front row to watch democracy in action. This is what they heard:

Burton: "We will enter a letter from the Justice Department into the record without objection—"

Kanjorski: "I object!"

Waxman: "So do I!"

Burton: "You object to having this letter—"

Kanjorski: "I've lost confidence in anything you ask...."

Then came a debate over the amount of time each side had to debate. "The clock will start now," said Burton.

"How can the clock start now?" asked Waxman. "I made a point of order."

"The chair rules that the point of order is out of order," said Burton.

Another congressman, looking on dumbfounded, declared: "This is the Congress of the United States!"

Although I couldn't hear him, it was then, according to people present, that Burton leaned over and called Waxman a "prick." (Burton's office admitted he had previously used the word "scumbag," which it said was Midwestern plainspeaking, but denied ever using "prick," which was not.) Meanwhile, California Representative Chris Cox, one of Burton's minders who apparently also hadn't heard the "prick" comment, continued to focus on Burton's original taunt. "Reprehensible," he claimed, was "essentially a five syllable word for scumbag." Democrat Edolphus Towns said he was tired of all the name-calling. "But," he added, looking at his GOP colleagues, "you act as if all the name-calling is on the minority side.... I think a lot of name-calling is on the majority side, starting with the chairman who is the biggest name-caller of all. He used the word 'scumbag'; that's a big name."

No bigger than "vile," charged GOP Representative Mark Souder, who had dispatched one of his aides to find a dictionary. According to *Webster's*, he said, "vile"—the word Waxman used—"means morally base or evil, wicked, depraved, sinful, repulsive, disgusting, cheap, worthless, degrading, low, and mean." Major Owens, a Democrat from New York, added his own word to the list: "feces," which is what he believed they were now all mired in. "I hope somehow that the children of America are not watching this," he said, as the four little girls looked on, crossing and uncrossing their legs.

Finally, after more than three hours, Congressman Tom Davis said he felt like taking a shower, and the meeting adjourned just as it had started: deadlocked. On his way out, Burton glanced at his wall of shame, already being dismantled. "Maybe we can use it next week," one of his aides said later. "It really was a good prop." •

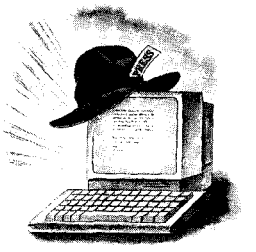
LAGOS DISPATCH

SANI DAYS

By Marcus Mabry

At the dusty terminal on the outskirts of Lagos where *Masa-Masa* (Yoruba for fast-fast) buses pick up their passengers, huge, run-down coaches spewing toxic fumes sport slogans like "Watch and Pray For Jesus" and "God's Time is Best." As my bus set out for the city of Enugu on the eve of the Pope's visit in March, the conductor turned off the World Wrestling Federation match on the overhead television and began an impromptu sermon. He asked God to "anoint this vessel," told the passengers the driver was blessed, and started hollering until he received an "amen" loud enough for God to hear.

As the bus flew over the unlit road, hymns and collective "amens" rising inside, the conductor switched into full gear. "There is no disease in your family," he shouted. "There is no poverty in your family." He railed against those who tried to sleep and reminded them of a recent bus accident where all the passengers died: "If you die, die a Christian. Everybody has an expiration date. If you die a Christian, you will rest in peace. Otherwise, you will rest in pieces." "Amen!" whooped the congregation.



Nigerians are intensely devout—and not just on overnight bus rides. There hasn't been a census since 1991, but it's estimated that one-half of Nigeria's 107 million citizens are Muslim, about 40 percent are Christian, and almost everybody believes in God. No one is happier about the country's religious fervor than dictator Sani Abacha. Abacha took power in a bloodless coup in 1993 and plans to keep it. In April, his hand-picked Transition Implementation Committee announced that presidential elections planned for August would be scrapped in favor of a referendum on one candidate only: Abacha.

He is widely despised for making Nigeria a pariah state, destroying the country's economy and introducing a level of repression the country hasn't known in decades of successive military regimes. Still, he's certain he'll win. Why? The intellectuals who make up Nigeria's pro-democracy movement say religious faith has diverted popular interest away from politics. They may be right. Angelina Okeke, a 40-year-old merchant who several weeks ago walked for two days to be one of the hundreds of thousands who listened to the Pope's only Sunday service in Nigeria, is a case in point. "We want the

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Pope to bring us a good leader, peace, and elections," Okeke told me as she waited for the pontiff to arrive.

Of course, another reason Nigerians shun politics is that opposing Abacha can be dangerous. Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has been ruled by a string of military thugs. Abacha's government, which seized power and jailed the presumed winner of Nigeria's last election, held in 1993, may be the most repressive ever. Soldiers armed with automatic weapons man every major intersection in Lagos. Hundreds of political prisoners are said to languish in what has become known as the Nigerian Gulag. They range from doctors and lawyers who worked with pro-democracy groups to regional politicians and tribal elders who refused to accede to Abacha's rule. They are housed in overcrowded and filthy prisons, where inmates can live for days with a corpse if a prisoner dies over the weekend. During his visit, the Pope gave Abacha a list of 60 political prisoners the Church wanted released. None has been freed yet.

Meanwhile, what remains of modern economic life is rotting away. Corruption is rampant. Nigeria ranks as OPEC's fourth-largest oil producer, but none of its four refineries works. Blackouts last for weeks. Last year, the director of the state-owned power company actually advised Nigerians to buy kerosene lanterns. Water-processing plants, schools, and paved roads are in disrepair. Eighty percent of the population lives below the poverty line, up from 41 percent in 1992.

These conditions have sparked widespread dissatisfaction with Abacha's rule. Last month, riots erupted in gas queues where drivers had been parked for five days, waiting for scarce petrol to arrive. A recent pro-Abacha rally—billed as "spontaneous" but believed to be government-funded—turned violent when counter-demonstrators clashed with police. Three students were killed. And, in the outlying oil-producing regions, the successors of environmentalist democracy advocate Ken Saro-Wiwa, executed in 1995, have increased their protests against oil companies and the dictatorship, forcing Abacha to deploy 30 percent of his troops there.

For the time being, though, the unrest has not translated into organized opposition. To be sure, at a meeting in Baltimore last month, exiled dissidents belonging to Nigeria's two largest ethnic groups agreed for the first time to put aside their rivalries and work together to oust the dictator. They've already claimed credit for the low voter turnout in legislative elections held last week—although this may have had more to do with Nigerians' sense of powerlessness than their desire to protest. And the pro-democracy groups have called for a nationwide day of protests against Abacha on May 1 in order to force him to step down and allow free elections. However, Nigeria's democratic groups remain severely hampered by the gulf between their mostly middle-class, urban leaders—a collection of lawyers, professionals, and Ph.D.s—and the deeply religious—and illiterate—masses. The national chairman of the National Democratic Coalition, Abraham Adesanya, is an attorney who peppers his speech with references to *Julius Caesar* and the Greek poet Senna; he seems hopelessly out of touch with a nation where most students don't even have textbooks.

Nor is the United States sending clear signals of support for democracy. True, the United States' limited human rights criticism has alienated Abacha enough to cause the dictator to assign lucrative oil contracts to French firms. But the U.S. is doing an increasing amount of business in Nigeria—investment and trade have risen by almost 50 percent since 1996 to a total of $7 billion. President Clinton spent much of his Africa tour last month warning that the era of despots and dictators is over, but he also hinted that the U.S. would be willing to accept Abacha as president if the general ran in the now-cancelled August elections as a civilian. This contradicted the line previously enunciated by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright as well as Assistant Secretary of State for Africans Affairs Susan Rice, who had warned in March that "an electoral victory by any military candidate in the forthcoming presidential elections in Nigeria would be unacceptable." And, although Washington condemned the cancellation of elections, it has failed to implement the sanctions against Nigerian oil that the opposition wants.

Meanwhile, Abacha is making sure no one stages a coup against him. Because of the perennial passivity of Nigeria's religious population, and because of the weakness and elitism of opposition politicians, political change in Nigeria has often come from the top—in the form of a preemptive strike by one group of generals against another. Knowing this, Abacha has recently purged hundreds of officers and ordered the execution of six alleged plotters. The fact that Abacha felt obliged to do this is a sure sign that things are getting worse economically and politically. It is also, alas, a sign that the crisis is more likely to lead to continued military rule—or sheer chaos—than to the peaceful transition to democracy that Nigeria's opposition is hoping for.

MARCUS MABRY is *Newsweek*'s Africa Bureau Chief.

KOSOVO DISPATCH

THE WARPATH

By Theresa Agovino

QIREZ, YUGOSLAVIA

The Albanian flag—a double-headed black eagle on a red background—stretched behind a framed photo of two men shot dead by Serbian police in March. Zeqir Rexhepi stood beside the memorial to his brother and uncle, greeting an endless stream of mourners who had traveled via tractor over windswept mountains to pay their respects. Rexhepi

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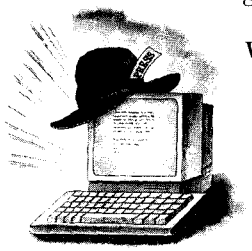
couldn't always play the host, though. He had condolence calls to make. Twenty-five people were killed in the village of Qirez and neighboring Likoshan as police attempted to eradicate the Kosovo Liberation Army, an armed rebel group demanding independence for the Serbian province where ethnic Albanians make up 90 percent of the population.

When Rexhepi returned to Kosovo last year after 13 years as a political exile in Germany, he didn't expect to endure a twelve-hour assault by police using helicopters, cannons, armored vehicles, and a multitude of guns. After all, more respect for human rights in the Balkans was one of the goals of the Dayton Peace Accord that ended the Bosnian crisis in 1995. Any new violations were supposed to bring sanctions down upon the Belgrade regime headed by President Slobodan Milosevic. "The Dayton agreement was supposed to improve the situation here. Milosevic signed it. The West backed it. I believed in it," said Rexhepi. "I thought the situation would calm down."

But Rexhepi was wrong. The international community was so intent on preserving Dayton—and keeping the Bosnian crisis from flaring up again—that it never pushed Milosevic hard on Kosovo. The international community actually began lifting sanctions against Yugoslavia more than a year ago, even as the number of deaths from Serb-Albanian clashes in Kosovo tripled. As a result, the plight of Rexhepi's fellow Albanians—who have lived in apartheid-like conditions in Kosovo since Milosevic stripped the province of its autonomy in 1989—has continued to worsen.



Over the last two months, police have killed more than 100 Albanians, practically all of them civilians, in a quest to extinguish the KLA. Serbian police still surround the region where the massacres occurred. They won't let most aid convoys through, and they've been known to use some of the starving Albanians for target practice. Milosevic, for his part, has resisted outside efforts to bring the fighting to a stop. Last week, he held a referendum on the question of whether international mediators should be allowed into Kosovo. Not surprisingly, the voters—all Serbs due to an Albanian boycott—said no. Meanwhile, the international community continues to dither about how to react, much as it did in the early stages of the conflict in Bosnia.

Of course, the Kosovo crisis is, in many ways, even more complicated than the one in Bosnia. Whereas that war always had a certain manufactured quality—the Serb push to conquer and "cleanse" Muslim-majority land was largely engineered by Milosevic—the ethnic quarrel in Kosovo has deep and genuine roots. The tiny Serb minority views the province, scene of an ancient Serb military defeat at the hands of the Turks, as the cradle of the Serbian nation. Albanians, for their part, harbor legitimate grievances about the systematic discrimination they have suffered at Serb hands. While some kind of conflict here was perhaps inevitable, the current state of despair is also the product of diplomatic miscues by outside powers. "It amazes me that we find ourselves behind the eight ball in the Balkans yet again," said Kurt Bassuener, a policy analyst at the Balkan Institute in Washington. "No one had given any thought to what would happen if there was a crackdown on the Albanians."

Indeed, for years, the West's chief worry was that Kosovo, the perennial Balkan tinderbox, would be the source of an Albanian revolt that could spill into neighboring Macedonia (which is also home to a large and disgruntled ethnic Albanian population) as well as Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey. This fear led Western diplomats to embrace the ostensible leader of Kosovo's Albanians, "shadow president" Ibrahim Rugova, whose passive, nonviolent approach to dealing with Serb abuses promised, or seemed to promise, a path to self-government that would avoid bloodshed.

It was a plausible enough strategy. Elected in 1992, Rugova fancies himself an Albanian version of Gandhi. When Rugova kept Kosovo from being caught up in the Bosnian violence—a legitimate and worthy accomplishment—Western leaders rewarded him by treating him as if he were a genuine head of state. Rugova met with top brass in many Western countries, and received all the courtesies extended visiting dignitaries, despite representing an outlawed government. Rugova even had an audience with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Rugova was also a source of frustration to the West, however. The international community supported self-government in Kosovo, but Rugova kept making loud calls for independence, fueling aspirations he was in no position to fulfill. Having fed the mystique surrounding him, the West could no longer control him. He rebuffed international advisers who encouraged him to end the Albanian boycott of Yugoslav elections, to hold more demonstrations, and to expand discussion of possible solutions to the problem to include options other than independence. Said one Western diplomat, "He became another paranoid Balkan leader who thought critics were trying to take his job."

At the same time, the Albanians themselves were becoming disenchanted with the lack of progress under Rugova. Eventually, the United States began courting other Albanian politicians who would be more effective spokesmen for a peaceful transition to self-government. But such efforts came too late. The KLA appeared on the scene in 1996, and the Kosovo Albanians—who believed that violence had brought attention and independence in Bosnia—were quick to support it. "The KLA is a predictable guerrilla movement that grew out of Rugova's ineffective leadership," said Dukagjin Gorani, political editor of *Koha Ditore*, an Albanian newspaper in Kosovo. "From a moral standpoint, it is hard for Albanians to criticize the KLA. The KLA brought CNN and the diplomats here."

For the international community, the KLA poses a dilemma. The KLA has attacked police stations and, more recently, assassinated police officers; this, in turn, prompted the police to stage a horrific raid on four vil-

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lages in the Drenica region of Kosovo. Diplomats don't want to countenance KLA terrorism, but they don't want to encourage Milosevic's draconian crackdown, either. Some observers believe that, when U.S. special envoy to the Balkans Robert Gelbard called the KLA a terrorist organization, Milosevic may have misinterpreted the remark as a green light to go after the group. "It was a mistake on Gelbard's part," said Janusz Bugajski, a director at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "You don't want to say anything that lets Milosevic think he has free rein in Kosovo."

Meanwhile, Western diplomats concede they remain perplexed by what Milosevic is really up to. On the one hand, Milosevic has named a special envoy from the Yugoslav federal government to participate in negotiations with Albanians, rather than simply dispatching a Serbian official—as he had initially suggested he would do. This would seem to signal a more tolerant attitude toward the Albanians in Kosovo. But Milosevic also just added an ultra-nationalist, Vojislav Seslj, to his government. And while Milosevic has agreed, in principle, to an education accord that would allow Albanian students to resume classes in the state-run university's buildings, he still refuses to allow an international third party to mediate talks with the Albanians.

As one diplomat admits, "We don't know what he is doing. He could be just stringing us along, or he could be preparing to enter a dialogue." Yet the international community seems to be giving Milosevic the benefit of the doubt. At the end of March, the Contact Group—the six nations that oversee the Balkan peace process—opted to delay imposing new threatened sanctions against Yugoslavia. They did so despite the fact that Yugoslavia failed to meet the Contact Group's demand to remove the military forces from Drenica. And they did so despite the deaths of at least two Albanians and attacks on four villages that sent people fleeing from their homes on the day before the Contact Group met. The Contact Group's only "action" was to issue yet another warning to Milosevic: If he does not begin serious discussions with Albanians regarding self-rule in the next month, the group may go back to sanctions.

It's not hard to see shades of Bosnia in the Kosovo conflict and the reaction to it. In both cases, the United States wanted to impose sanctions immediately. In both cases, Russia, a traditional ally of the Serbs and Yugoslavia's chief weapons supplier, argued against the sanctions, while the Europeans largely favored giving Milosevic more time to make slow progress toward compliance. While diplomats have responded more quickly to the violence in Kosovo than they did to the early stages of the disaster in Bosnia, the cracks in the Contact Group have, if anything, appeared more swiftly this time than they did the last. The real tragedy of the bloodshed in Drenica may be that it has taught Milosevic just how much he can get away with in Kosovo. One hundred dead Albanians attract the world's attention. But a few half-hearted moves toward compromise can postpone sanctions.

Diplomats insist the latest set of sanctions—which include freezing Yugoslavia's assets abroad, halting foreign investment in Serbia and Montenegro, and ending export credits to Belgrade—would finally push Milosevic over the edge. That's doubtful, since Milosevic has survived sanctions for over six years. But Western governments will never know if they don't implement them. They'd also better hope they work, and work quickly. Otherwise, the world will have to brace itself to deal with a polarized situation controlled by KLA assassins on one extreme and Milosevic's brutal security forces on the other.

THERESA AGOVINO is a freelance journalist based in Central Europe.

Congress rides to your creditor's rescue.

BANKRUPT POLICY

By Joshua Wolf Shenk

In 1921, when wheat prices plunged at the Kansas City Grain Exchange, Harry Truman's clothing store on 12th Street tumbled as well. But Truman, unlike his partners, refused to declare bankruptcy and vowed instead to pay off his debts. It took 15 years.

In January 1998, Toni Braxton, whose two albums have amassed $170 million in sales and who owns a baby grand piano, a Porsche, and a Lexus, filed for bankruptcy under federal law. She became the latest in a string of celebrities—Kim Basinger, Burt Reynolds, M.C. Hammer—to fend off creditors while continuing to live in luxury. "I'm gonna go out and enjoy myself," Braxton told a reporter after her filing.

Republican Congressman George Gekas says Americans need to be more like Harry Truman and less like Toni Braxton. Personal bankruptcy, he complains, has "become fashionable, *en vogue*. The Hollywood trendsetters do it." This helps explain why bankruptcies have jumped from around 200,000 in 1978 to more than 1.3 million in 1997.

Gekas's solution is House Resolution 3150, which would radically overhaul the bankruptcy system. It would not only give creditors more power to wrest payment from people who have filed for legal protection but also make it tougher for people to declare bankruptcy in the first place. Congress will consider his measure—and a Senate version sponsored by Republican Charles Grassley and Democrat Richard Durbin—this May. Its champions promote it as a consumer issue; after all, consumers pay for bankruptcies in the form of higher prices and interest rates.

Gekas's logic has a certain commonsense appeal. If people irresponsibly run up bills they can't pay, why

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should the law protect them? But a quick look at the bills' interest-group supporters—from the American Bankers Association to the National Retail Federation—provides a clue as to just whose interests the measures would really serve. Under both proposals, those who are rich enough to hire the best legal help and squirrel away their assets would still be safe from their creditors. Poor and middle-income people who run up big balances on their credit cards—then get hit by divorce, medical bills, or a layoff—would have to live by strict new rules.

Of course, those who buy big-screen TVs on credit instead of paying cash for a smaller set should have to face the consequences of their own profligacy. But there should be accountability, too, particularly for credit card companies that aggressively target risky customers because they can make money off them—then complain about the money they lose when these customers go broke. The current bankruptcy proposals, for all their righteous bluster, would only encourage such corporate behavior.

The main purpose of the bills is to limit eligibility for Chapter 7 protection, which allows debtors to erase credit card and other "unsecured" debt so they can devote money to taxes, home loans, and child support. Under the Gekas bill, people who make 75 percent of the median income, adjusted for household size, would have to document their debts and expenses. If they can pay 20 percent of their unsecured debt over five years—according to an IRS formula—they will be ineligible to declare personal bankruptcy.

The problem, many bankruptcy attorneys and judges say, is that the IRS formula underestimates the real cost of living, leaving out such costs as college tuition and child care. (Filers would have to claim these as "extraordinary expenses," which are subject to challenge by creditors.) The new laws would also lock bankruptcy-filers into fixed payments, on the assumption that filers would continue to receive income, even though they tend to be hobbled by job insecurity, continuing medical bills, and other financial problems. The primary effect of mandating payments for unsecured debt would be to divert money to credit card companies that would have otherwise gone to taxes and home payments.

Of course, means-testing bankruptcy-filers has an undeniable appeal. "Right now," argues William Binzel, a spokesman for the credit card industry, "you need not be bankrupt to file for bankruptcy. It's fundamentally unfair to consumers who do repay their bills to allow debtors who can pay to walk away." Binzel and Gekas cite two studies: One, by the Credit Research Center at Georgetown University, found that 25 percent of those filing Chapter 7 bankruptcies could actually repay 30 percent of their unsecured debt. The other, by Ernst and Young, found an average of twelve percent of Chapter 7 filers could repay an average of 74 percent.

But these reports—both underwritten by the credit card industry—are hardly definitive. As the General Accounting Office concluded: "Neither report provides reliable answers to the questions of how many debtors could make some repayment and how much debt they could repay." Indeed, most studies suggest that those declaring bankruptcy need it more than ever. Between 1981 and 1997, the median income of a family in bankruptcy (in 1997 dollars) fell from $23,254 to $17,652. "If ... lots of slick guys were declaring bankruptcy," says Elizabeth Warren, a bankruptcy expert at Harvard Law School, "then you should see the median income of the debtors rise, but it is falling."

Here's why: While admirable, Harry Truman's stringent ethic is not necessarily applicable to the age of the credit card. Today, people of all economic classes have access to vast amounts of high-interest credit. More than 25 percent of households with less than $10,000 of annual income carry credit card debt, and nearly 42 percent of households with an income between $10,000 and $25,000 do. Overall, some 55 to 60 million households carry a credit card debt of more than $7,000 month to month. Revolving credit is the single largest component of consumer debt, now exceeding $450 billion—double the figure of five years ago.

Credit cards have become wildly profitable in recent years. According to University of Maryland professor Lawrence Ausubel, the pre-tax return on assets to credit card issuers averaged 1.19 percent between 1971 and 1982 but jumped to 4.5 percent between 1983 and 1993. That fact, plus a change in the way banks finance credit card lending, has led to a dramatic increase in the number of credit cards being offered to consumers. In 1997, one bank alone, MBNA, sent out 30 million solicitations per month—and tendered six million offers by phone. "Solicitations are merely advertisements," says William Binzel. "Just as consumers ought not go have a Big Mac every time they see a McDonald's ad, they probably ought not avail themselves of every credit card solicitation they receive." Yes, but enticing risky borrowers is a big reason why credit cards earn twice as much for banks as all other financial services combined. The same customers who are at risk of defaulting are the ones who finance debt with payments at or near the monthly minimum.

With the Gekas bill's dramatic new collection powers at their disposal, credit card issuers will take even more risks on marginal customers. But wouldn't "good customers" benefit? While Binzel claims the Gekas bill would recover $15 billion—"that's $150 per household in savings," he boasts—don't count on seeing that money unless you're in the credit card business. There's only a weak correlation between the cost of doing business for credit card issuers and the interest rates they charge customers. In the 1980s, Ausubel points out, "credit card interest rates displayed a profound unresponsiveness to changes in the cost of funds." While market interest rates ranged from six to 14 percent, credit card rates stayed above 18 percent.

Congress should demand more responsibility from both lenders and borrowers. Credit card issuers should be required to tell customers explicitly how long it would take to pay off their balances through monthly minimum payments—and what the total interest bill would

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be. And, if Gekas truly wants to cut down on the abuse of the bankruptcy system, he should go after true abusers. For example, five states allow bankruptcy-filers to protect a "homestead" of any value, which encourages wealthy filers to sink their assets into multi-million-dollar homes in, say, Florida, while pleading poverty to their creditors. Says an aide to Gekas: "Are there certain people who can continue to put everything into a home and game the system? Probably. Capping the exemptions seemed to us like a good idea. But it's not politically feasible."

Bankruptcy should be a safety net, giving Americans who've failed financially a chance to make a fresh start. Gekas would turn that system on its head, making the bankruptcy process a taxpayer-funded collection service for already hugely profitable credit card issuers. Surely the law needs to encourage responsible financial behavior. Yet the law should also reflect the fact that financial institutions—especially institutions that place credit cards in the hands of so many people who are probably not financially equipped to handle them—are acting irresponsibly, too.

JOSHUA WOLF SHENK, a former editor of *The Washington Monthly*, is a freelance writer in New York City.

Is it really such a crazy idea?

THE FAT TAX

By Hanna Rosin

You knew tobacco heavies were getting desperate when they seized on this forgettable quotation, spoken by a Yale professor to the second-string paper in Boston: "To me, there is no difference between Ronald McDonald and Joe Camel." Within a week, the quote has found its way into high-decibel opinion columns across the country, and it eventually screeched its way into a prophetic *Wall Street Journal* editorial entitled "Who's Next?" "First, public health groups will determine that hamburgers cause cancer and heart disease," the editorialists warned. "The trial lawyers will begin class actions on behalf of adults who blame their illness on . . . special sauce." Before we know it, poor Ronald McDonald will be doing time for peddling poison to kids, and the rest of us will be reduced to cutting out contraband photos of smoking starlets with those neon-orange safety scissors they hand out in kindergarten.

The Wall Street Journal's reasoning is built on the same assumption as all slippery slope arguments: The human mind is like the canine mind; once legislators get a taste of blood, they won't know where to stop. But the *Journal* is out of luck. The Yale professor, Dr. Kelly Brownell, is not leading a mass movement on the streets of New Haven and has no plans to do so. As director of Yale's Center for Eating and Weight Disorders, Brownell spends his days devising sensible, individually tailored diets for patients who are either wasting away or growing dangerously obese from various food-related obsessions.

True, he's writing a book about how to fix what he calls our "toxic food environment," the publication of which is likely to prompt another alarmist editorial in *The Wall Street Journal*. But, though Brownell has been talking about his ideas for over a decade, so far he's found little enthusiasm for them in the academic community—let alone the wider world. (The normally alarmist Center for Science in the Public Interest calls Brownell's suggestions "pretty extreme.") Most of his data come from only a handful of studies done by the University of Minnesota researchers. And, even on the slowest news day, three professors do not constitute an alarming trend.

It's too bad Brownell isn't more popular. If you accept that America is entering a Puritan phase, then regulating fat can actually be a less intrusive policy than regulating tobacco. Eating habits are more flexible than smoking habits. While people can become addicted to nicotine, they can't become addicted to fat (not medically speaking, at least). By that logic, even small incentives to change behavior, such as increasing prices, can have a noticeable effect.

Brownell's reasoning starts with the premise that the number of diet-related deaths is in the same ballpark as the number of tobacco-related deaths: 300,000 a year and climbing for food, compared with 500,000 a year and dropping for smoke. About one-third of the U.S. population is 20 percent or more overweight and is therefore at risk of suffering high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and other cardiovascular diseases. Fat advocates dispute these numbers and will likely argue that Brownell (and I) are shills for the diet industry, but several reputable organizations have independently confirmed the dangers of obesity, including the Centers for Disease Control and the Harvard School of Public Health.

To date, all theories on how to control the epidemic of obesity have failed in practice or even backfired. The scientific pendulum has swung from blaming evil outside forces, to blaming individuals, and back to evil forces again—that is, from blaming Freudian oral fixations, to blaming overindulgent appetites, to blaming bad genes. Brownell wants to stop it somewhere in the middle, to hold people responsible for their own weight loss but help them out a bit. How can anyone lose weight, he argues, when temptation is everywhere, when three new McDonald's restaurants open up every day, when at any hour of the day or night you can treat yourself to a Value Meal from the shame-free anonymity of the drive-thru? "It is tragic," says Brownell, speaking on a cell phone that picks up the clop-clop of the vigorous, fat-melting Yale tennis match he is watching, "that any American child you stop on the street will recognize 'super-size' as a verb."

To nudge people away from the drive-thru, Brownell

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advocates *The Wall Street Journal*'s worst nightmare: a fat tax, where foods with high fat content are taxed at a higher rate. In an ideal world, Brownell would have the government subsidize fruits and vegetables and tax foods with more than a certain number of grams of fat. Carrots should be dirt cheap, he says, but you should have to think twice before buying carrot cake.

Most people consider the fat tax a far-fetched idea. Measuring fat content is not always practical. Hamburger meat has a certain percentage of fat, but most of it would melt away during grilling. And what about sugary no-fat snacks such as soda and candy? Besides, a version of the fat tax has already been tried—and it failed. Over the last decade, California, Maryland, and Maine instituted snack taxes levied mostly on junk food such as candy bars, potato chips, and soda. The Snack Food Association eventually killed the tax in all but one state.

Short of the tax, though, other experiments with pricing incentives have had a dramatic effect on eating habits. One of the Minnesota researchers, Dr. Robert Jeffery, went to a grocery store to monitor whether customers paid attention to nutrition education posters. After a few days, he realized they noticed the signs, but not nearly as much as they noticed sales. A huge neon cholesterol warning in the dairy section would be totally ignored if eggs were selling at half price that week.

His revelation led to the vending machine experiment. Dr. Jeffery, Dr. Simone French, and some other researchers picked a vending machine at a university and reduced the prices of all products containing less than three grams of fat—pretzels, baked potato chips, Snackwell's foods, rice cakes, animal crackers, granola bars, fat-free fudge—by 50 percent. In three weeks, the percentage of low-fat snacks purchased increased by 80 percent, from 25 percent of total purchases to about 46 percent. Customers purchased many more low-fat snacks, while the sales of fatty snacks decreased modestly.

The researchers then took their experiment to the nutritionist's favorite experimental milieu: high school cafeterias. They picked two high schools—one mostly white, suburban, and middle-class, the other inner-city and ethnically diverse—and discounted salads, bags of carrots, and fruits by 50 percent. After three weeks, nobody bought more salads, but sales of carrots doubled in the suburban school, and sales of fruit quadrupled in the urban school. Total food sales and total number of customers did not change significantly, so the same people must have been substituting healthier foods for their usual choices. (Dr. French is now doing a twelve-month study to determine how low the price has to go before people will substitute a low-fat snack for a Snickers.)

What can we do with these results? They prove, at least, that some form of food tax isn't as regressive as a tobacco tax. True, people with low incomes spend more of their income on food and buy more junk food. But calling the tax regressive assumes it doesn't work. They may have a hard time giving up cigarettes, but it seems relatively easy to convince poor consumers to replace a cookie with an apple.

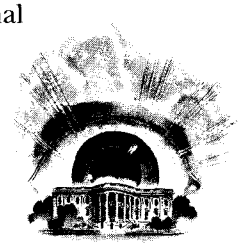
Of course, nutritionists are fighting an uphill battle. High school cafeterias aren't what they used to be. Most are now mini-malls, where Papa John's pizza and Taco Bell burritos compete for shelf space and the school takes the profit. Still, the federal government now partially reimburses schools for the meals they provide, so it can skew that refund to subsidize healthier meals more generously. Nutritionists can also urge schools to forgo some of the profits on lower-fat foods in either the vending machine or the cafeteria and to charge more for high-fat foods to make up the difference. Kids will still gravitate to Papa John's, but they may at least add in an apple a day. •

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

WONDERWONK

By Dana Milbank

In December 1996, Elena Kagan quit her job as a lawyer in the White House counsel's office to return to the University of Chicago, where she was a tenured professor of constitutional law. She had already scheduled the movers, and 120 law students in Chicago had registered for her class. Colleagues had even given her a sendoff in the White House mess. But Bruce Reed, Clinton's new domestic policy chief, begged her to stay, offering her the number two spot on the Domestic Policy Council and promising her an equal partnership running the White House policy shop. It was an unconventional choice, and some in the West Wing wondered why Reed would pick a lawyer to be top wonk.



They don't wonder anymore. Kagan, though virtually unknown outside the White House, has become the administration's lead negotiator on tobacco, crafting much of Senator John McCain's tobacco legislation. The story of Kagan's involvement in hammering out a deal with Senate Republicans illustrates just how active the administration has been in shaping tobacco legislation behind the scenes. Although Reed and White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles are the public faces of Clinton's tobacco team, Kagan engineered the White House's most significant win in the tobacco talks so far: convincing McCain and his fellow Senate Republicans to give the Food and Drug Administration full regulatory authority over tobacco, while keeping the administration's bureaucrats at bay.

Giving the FDA broad power over tobacco (which the industry dodged in last year's settlement with state attor-

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neys general) should do more than the blunt instrument of taxes to wipe out smoking. Even if the McCain legislation fails, which seems increasingly likely in light of Republican opposition in the House, the groundwork has been laid for including FDA regulation in whatever tobacco legislation eventually passes. As Kagan puts it: "Having McCain's and [Tennessee Republican Senator] Frist's agreement on this means we have a fairly broad, bipartisan approach, and it will make it into the final legislation regardless of what else is in it."

Ironically, Kagan was a teenage smoker herself and quit only in 1993 after 17 years. "I love smoking, and I still miss it," she says. "It's completely clear to me how addictive this product is. But it's also clear to me how much people can enjoy smoking." Now 38 years old, she has a no-frills appearance and a New York accent left over from her childhood on Manhattan's West Side. Kagan met Bruce Reed at Princeton, when she was opinion editor of *The Daily Princetonian* and he was a columnist. After an Oxford fellowship and Harvard Law School, she clerked for Thurgood Marshall and worked on the Dukakis campaign, then joined the law faculty at Chicago.

Kagan's legal training came in handy in her forays into the minutiae of tobacco legislation. Her moment came in late March, when Reed was vacationing in Europe and Kagan squared off with Republican senators and their staffs on the eve of the Senate Commerce Committee's April 1 markup of the legislation. An earlier proposal by Republican senators James Jeffords and Orrin Hatch had fallen apart over the question of giving regulatory authority to the FDA.

The White House started by arguing that the FDA should regulate tobacco under the "drug and device" chapter in the law, essentially codifying the authority that the agency has already claimed for itself—and which the tobacco industry is currently challenging in court. Senators McCain, Frist, Hatch, and Jeffords all objected, as did the pharmaceutical industry, which feared that it would get harsher treatment along with tobacco. But the FDA insisted on the "drug and device" chapter, figuring that losing this would weaken the regulations and make the agency more vulnerable to court challenges. That might have been the end of it, but Kagan hatched a plan for a separate title under the law for tobacco, giving the FDA virtually the same regulatory language and legal standing it demanded, but moving the wording to another part of the law to soothe the Republicans.

That seemed to hold, but, as late as Friday, March 27, the agreement again was in danger of falling apart when Frist raised new concerns. He worried that, under the new title, the FDA would get authority over tobacco farmers, not just tobacco, and that the FDA might go too far in limiting retail sales of tobacco or in banning nicotine. Kagan pleaded for 24 hours to work out a deal, and she went through each point with the senator in painstaking detail. Negotiations stretched into the wee hours of the morning. They finally agreed that the FDA would delay by two years any serious action—say, eliminating a class of tobacco product or reducing or eliminating nicotine content—so Congress could review the decision. She also convinced the agencies to accept this token recognition of Congress's prerogatives. Congress, she argued, can reverse FDA decisions anyway. By late Saturday, the deal was done.

Kagan broke a third impasse in the FDA talks when McCain demanded language guaranteeing that the FDA would examine whether its actions could stimulate a black market in tobacco. If, for example, the FDA required all cigarettes to taste awful, smokers would turn to contraband. The FDA balked at such an economic restriction, and talks bogged down. But Kagan "finessed the issue," says Rich Tarplin of the Department of Health and Human Services, who negotiated alongside Kagan and the FDA's William Schultz. She found a legalistic way to give over to McCain without unduly restricting the FDA. Specifically, she agreed to language calling on the FDA to make the black market a "consideration" but assured the FDA it would never be held legally accountable if a black market did develop. Hearing the law professor's case, Schultz and Tarplin consented, and the talks went on.

The Commerce Committee endorsed McCain's bill with a 19 to one vote, and the bill is due to reach the Senate floor the week before Memorial Day. Although it got most of what it wanted, the Clinton administration is still haggling to toughen the bill's so-called "look back" provisions by making penalties for missing teen-smoking reductions company-specific. It also wants to tighten the bill's indoor-air-quality provisions. But these considerations, and even the $1.10-per-pack tax increase over five years, should turn out to be less significant than giving the FDA say over what, where, how, and to whom the tobacco industry sells. The FDA provision was "the toughest nut to crack," says Reed. Without it, "the whole thing would've blown up."

Kagan has become something of an all-purpose brain in a place full of people who are more smart than wise. Last Tuesday, when aides were preparing the president for a meeting, he was stumped about a question on Supreme Court rulings on federalism. Instead of calling the Justice Department or the counsel's office, Clinton sent for Kagan. Clinton and Kagan sat in the Oval Office discussing various rulings, wonk to wonk. On tobacco, her legal experience often allows her to beat back challenges from her own side, including concerns the Justice Department had about the constitutionality of liability provisions and of restrictions on cigarette advertising. Normally, objections from the Justice Department would put a halt to negotiations, leaving the White House negotiator furious but powerless. But Kagan "can engage with us and figure out how we can get it done," says David Ogden, who represents the department on tobacco matters.

Kagan uses knowledge as a weapon, absorbing thou-

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sands of pages of legal and policy minutiae and then deploying information to beat down opposing arguments. "I don't want to tell you that she rolled me, but she was coming at me so hard," says a Hill negotiator who opposed Kagan in much of the negotiation. "She reminds me of Bobby Knight's old [University of Indiana basketball] teams that used to wear you down with defense."

The combination of Reed and Kagan, who takes Reed's place twice a week at the daily 7:45 a.m. meeting with Bowles, has made the White House policy operation more prominent than in the early Clinton years. Some resident eggheads had been fluent in policy but politically tone-deaf, drawing complaints of arrogance from the Hill. And academic purists in the agencies have campaigned vigorously against the White House at times. During welfare reform, the scholarly types at HHS fought tooth and nail against the president's executive orders loosening federal regulation of state programs; several academics resigned after Clinton signed the welfare reform law. But Reed has found a hybrid in Kagan, a nerd who can talk tough. John Raidt, the Commerce Committee's staff director, who sat across the table from her through most of the talks, contrasts Kagan's cool performance with the way some other administration negotiators "lash out and get angry, because they don't always know what's going on."

Kagan says she'll see the tobacco law through, but she doubts she'll stick around for the rest of the Clinton years. "I miss the academic life," she says. If she's lucky, she might even land a judgeship. You can picture it now: the woman who vanquished tobacco, in her chambers, surrounded by legal volumes, finishing off an opinion—and reaching into her desk for a lighter and a highly taxed stogie. Cigarettes are out, Kagan says, but "I still smoke the occasional cigar." •

How Democrats got hooked on tobacco taxes.

THE GREAT LIBERAL SMOKEOUT

By Jonathan Chait

When the Democratic leaders of Congress sat down with President Bush in 1990 to hammer out a budget agreement, they insisted that the deal not impose any additional tax burdens on the poor. After every new twist in the negotiations, the conferees would pause as their staff economists compiled tables detailing how each income category would fare under any given combination of taxes. And although the final agreement did include higher "sin taxes" on cigarettes and liquor—which hit low-income taxpayers disproportionately—the Democrats insisted that this regressive burden be offset by an expansion of the earned income tax credit, a subsidy for the working poor.

This concern with distributional equity was very much in keeping with the Democratic Party's historic role as protector of the economic underdog. Now, however, something very different is happening. The Democratic Party, with the help of some Republicans, has decided to tax the dickens out of cigarettes.

Since everybody seems to have forgotten, let's refresh our memories about who pays cigarette taxes. Any sales levy that exacts the same tax from all comers, regardless of ability to pay, is inherently regressive. A sales tax on bread, for example, would exact a relatively higher toll on the poor than on the wealthy, because the poor must spend a higher percentage of their income on food. A cigarette tax is even more regressive than a bread tax, because the poor tend to smoke more heavily than the wealthy. Adding $1.50 to the cost of a pack of cigarettes would cost taxpayers who earn less than $10,000 per year four percent of their income; by contrast, it would cost those earning more than $200,000 per year just one-tenth of a percent of their income, according to Citizens for Tax Justice, a liberal tax-research group.

Ordinarily, such punishment of the lower classes would evoke stirring denunciations from the Ted Kennedys and Marion Wright Edelmans of the world. Yet nothing of the sort has happened. On the contrary, liberal Democrats are championing cigarette taxes far larger than the ones they grudgingly and conditionally acceded to in 1990, and they have made no effort to counterbalance the huge costs such a tax will impose upon the poor. Indeed, they have blithely shrugged off the clear class ramifications of taxing tobacco and, with barely a word of protest, proceeded headlong toward a dubious experiment in government paternalism. Conservatives with ties to the tobacco industry—who are practically the only ones speaking out against this effort—have lambasted this proposal as liberalism run amok, but it would be better described as liberalism betrayed.

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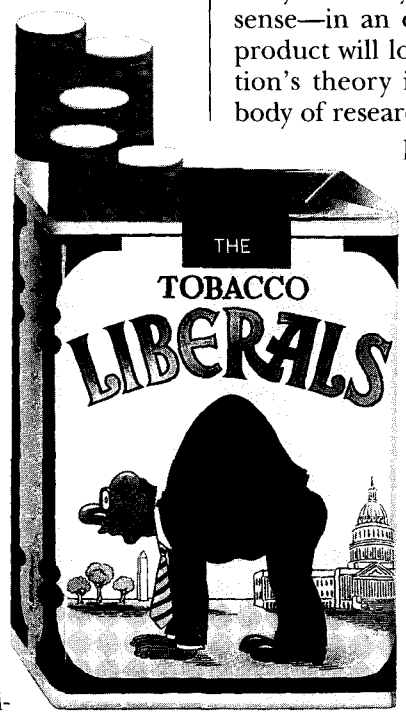
Why are the Democrats so eager to soak the poor? The obvious and conventional explanation is the lure of easy financing for new spending programs. Under the current budgetary rules, you must find a source of funding for any new spending initiative. That is, any new spending must be offset by equally large spending cuts or tax increases. In practice, this means that any new spending cannot pass without upsetting some political constituency. But opinion polls show that the public approves of taxing tobacco. Thus, a tobacco tax would provide Democrats with a politically easy way to finance their new domestic agenda.

President Clinton points to the prospect of new spending as a justification for the regressivity of the cigarette tax. Democrats have made just this kind of bargain before. Social Security is financed by a regressive payroll tax, yet Social Security distributes its benefits progressively enough that low-wage workers still get a good deal. The cigarette tax could pass the fairness test if the White House could devote the revenues toward sufficiently munificent ends. For example, if the money coming in through the tobacco tax went back out primarily as subsidies to provide universal health coverage, day care for parents on workfare, or an expansion of the earned income tax credit, liberals could justify it as part of a progressive bargain.



But that's not how the money will be spent. Clinton would spend about one-third of the tobacco money on anti-smoking programs, compensation for tobacco farmers, and unrestricted funding for state governments (as promised under the tobacco settlement). Of the remaining two-thirds, the lion's share would go toward increased funding for medical and scientific research—a worthy expenditure, to be sure, but not one that would disproportionately benefit low-income groups. Less than one-quarter of the cigarette-tax revenues remain for programs that mainly help the less prosperous.

Even that paltry share will almost certainly shrink by the time Clinton's budget makes it through Congress (assuming it can). Republicans insist that any cigarette-tax revenues should pay for other tax cuts. And the tax cuts they propose—correcting the "marriage penalty" or giving tax deductions to people who buy their own health insurance—are all skewed heavily in favor of upper-income groups. In fact, devoting the cigarette-tax revenues to GOP-favored tax cuts might be the only way to win conservative support for a tobacco settlement. "If I could ensure that, every dime of a tobacco tax increase would go towards a tax cut, I might support it," wrote House Whip Tom DeLay in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed. (This is why Republican complaints about the regressivity of the cigarette tax should be taken with a grain of salt; their true fear isn't that the tax is too regressive but that the revenues from it won't be spent regressively *enough*.) In any event, the final product of any tobacco deal approved by Congress will likely raise taxes at the bottom of the income scale and lower them at the top.

To the White House—and other supporters of the bill—these distributional consequences of higher cigarette prices are unpleasant but rather beside the point. "It's more complicated than a tax distribution table," says Clinton adviser Bruce Reed. "The reason we're for the price increase is that it's the most important step to keep young people from starting in the first place."

The premise that higher cigarette prices will dramatically reduce youth smoking certainly makes intuitive sense—in an efficient market, raising the price for a product will lower demand for it. And the administration's theory is, in fact, supported by a considerable body of research. Nonetheless, it is a much less certain proposition than the White House and its allies make it out to be.

The relevant factor in this matter is "elasticity," which is an economics term that describes how much a given kind of behavior can change in response to incentives. Behavior that is apt to change is elastic. Rigid behavior is inelastic. The question of whether taxes can keep kids away from cigarettes, then, boils down to whether or not teenagers' demand for cigarettes is elastic—i.e., whether or not a rise in the price of cigarettes will cause the demand for them to drop. If teen cigarette demand is elastic, a cigarette tax could reduce youth smoking. If it is inelastic, then a tax won't work.

Studies have shown that states with higher cigarette taxes have lower rates of teen smoking. Thus, researchers have long deduced that the demand for cigarettes among youths is elastic. In other words, higher taxes raise the cost of smoking and cause the youth-smoking rate to drop. The standard explanation for this is that, since teens are not yet addicted to nicotine, and since they don't have much money, higher cigarette prices will discourage them from buying cigarettes.

Researchers at Cornell University, however, have recently identified a common flaw in all these findings: States with high cigarette taxes also tend to be the ones with strong anti-smoking sentiment. States where the public approves of smoking, on the other hand, do not institute high taxes on cigarettes in the first place. If this is true, then cigarette taxes are not the independent variable that determines whether or not teens smoke. Instead, a third factor—general attitudes

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toward smoking—is determining both the level of taxation and the level of teen smoking.

For instance, the major tobacco-producing states—North Carolina, Kentucky, and Virginia—have the lowest cigarette taxes in the country, and eighth-graders in these states also smoke more than their counterparts elsewhere. Conventional thinking would interpret this fact as yet more evidence that low cigarette taxes cause more teen smoking. But it's entirely possible that the reason kids in these states smoke more than kids in other states is simply that people in North Carolina, Kentucky, and Virginia are more tolerant of smoking. This tolerance also explains why these states have low cigarette taxes: People don't dislike smoking as much, so they don't want to tax it as much. Not only that: State governments want to do everything they can to protect demand for the local tobacco farmer's crop.

Sure enough, when the Cornell researchers examined the relationship between cigarette prices and youth smoking in every state *except* North Carolina, Kentucky, and Virginia, the elasticity disappeared. Kids in the remaining low-tax states were not more or less likely to smoke than the kids in high-tax states. Hence, the study found, raising the cigarette tax would not do very much to curtail youth smoking.

This explanation makes sense once you think about how and why teenagers start smoking in the first place. Teen smoking is a matter of youth culture more than youth economics. Kids start smoking because of peer pressure, and most of them smoke, at most, just a few dozen cigarettes a week with their friends. Since each cigarette costs only about a dime, smoking doesn't put much strain on a typical teenager's budget—and it still wouldn't, even if government raises the price of each cigarette by another nickel. How many teenagers, after all, would be willing to risk their social standing to save a few bucks a week?

The Cornell study was not the first to cast doubt on the notion that cigarette taxes can dissuade kids from smoking. But it was the first to highlight the flawed assumptions of the studies that suggest otherwise. As researchers have looked more closely at youth smoking, they have generally grown less certain that taxes can keep kids from smoking. "Gradually, the elasticities have fallen," observes Jane Gravelle, an economist with the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service.

Given that the smoking propensities of youths remain mysterious, it seems strange to tax the 98 percent of smokers who are adults in order to experiment on the two percent of smokers who aren't. Here we arrive at the philosophical crux of the Democrats' position. The White House believes higher cigarette prices will induce some adult smokers to quit and others to smoke less heavily, thereby improving their health.

This is an altogether new kind of justification for regulating cigarettes. It is not like banning smoking in the workplace, which protects nonsmokers from being forced to breathe in their coworkers' secondhand smoke. Nor is it like restricting tobacco advertising, which protects children (who cannot always make informed decisions) from a dangerous product. Rather, the intent is to protect adult smokers from themselves. As a Treasury Department official concedes: "Quite frankly, we're making a paternalistic argument because it's an addictive product."

The claim here is simple. Since nicotine is addictive, adult smokers cannot rationally choose how much they smoke. For purposes of the decision whether or not to smoke, they are, in effect, children. Therefore, the government will try to induce them to quit for their own good. "Our view is that smoking is a regressive habit," argues Reed. The poor will pay more taxes, the Treasury Department official acknowledges, but they "will gain disproportionately in health terms."

But there's a paradox. The people gaining in health terms aren't exactly the same people who pay the tax. Those who enjoy the most health benefits—the ones who reduce their smoking—will pay the least tax. Those who continue their smoking habit will get no health benefits at all but will pay the most tax. The minimum-wage worker who spends another five percent of his income on tobacco taxes will hardly be comforted by the knowledge that his neighbor who quit has added another couple of years to his life expectancy.

Second, the Clintonites are having it both ways about addiction. The addictiveness of smoking may offer a rationale for protecting smokers from themselves, but it undercuts the rationale for taxing them. Why punish people for behavior they can't control?

The overriding problem with paternalism is that it overstates the meaning of addiction. Nicotine may be addictive, but that doesn't mean smokers have lost all free will. One-half of all adults who have ever smoked have quit. As Harvard law professor W. Kip Viscusi shows in *Smoking: Making the Risky Decision*, smokers fully comprehend the health risks of cigarettes. Viscusi conducted surveys about the probability that cigarettes could cause lung cancer, for instance, and found that a large majority of the public *overstates* the risk of contracting lung cancer from smoking. Smoking, then, is not quite a fully rational decision to trade health and longevity for the pleasure of tobacco, but neither is it a purely compulsive tic of the helpless addict.

The tobacco industry has cheapened the language of individual freedom. But, in the end, smoking really is largely a personal decision. It's fine to regulate cigarette advertising or to protect nonsmokers from secondhand smoke. These activities have broad effects. Liberalism also holds, however, that individuals should be able to make their own decisions on matters that only affect themselves. The hard choices come when the demands of economic justice and personal liberty collide. On the matter of cigarette taxes, the two values dovetail. How did liberals wind up on the other side? •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

In A Different Light

In 1960, two films about Oscar Wilde were released here. Reviewing them together, I said:

> Wilde was pilloried because of acts which, if they had been heterosexual, would have elicited about equal parts of conventional shock and envy. What was on trial here, essentially, was a person's right to be homosexual. It was simply too early in the calendar of social progress for Wilde to claim that right.

I dig this up to underscore how rapidly that calendar has flipped along since 1960, let alone since Wilde's day. Nowadays, partly because of that calendar change, there is a resurgence of interest in Wilde.

Not in Wilde's work so much as in the man. The work, though not always prominent, has never been obscured. (For a time it seemed that resident theaters in America couldn't get grants unless they did *The Importance of Being Earnest.*) Greatly enlarged sexual freedom has transformed Wilde, in the light of today's acceptance, from an outstanding victim into something of a tragic hero.

Last season there was an off-Broadway play about the Wilde trials. Very recently Liam Neeson opened as Wilde in a London play that is headed for Broadway. And here is **Wilde** (Sony Pictures Classics)—a British film, of course—in which he is seen as a proponent of a sexual view that, aesthetically and morally, was far in advance of his time, a view now so widely accepted that the audience can feel it is peering back into the Middle Ages. Among the signs of this great change are the scenes of homosexual intimacy, which would have been impossible in those 1960 films.

First, let's look at the most important element. *Wilde* stands or falls, primarily, on the performance of the title role, and Stephen Fry is splendid. I've seen three other Wildes, Robert Morley and Peter Finch in those two earlier films and Michéal MacLiammóir in a one-man show. All had admirable qualities, but Fry surpasses them. He is celebrated in British theater and TV and film as actor and writer. (He also writes novels. One of them, *Making History*, is just published here.) Americans may remember him as the host in a country-weekend film called *Peter's Friends*, or as Jeeves in the PBS *Jeeves and Wooster.* He was urbane there, and of course he is urbane here, but he also has dignity and depth to justify Wilde's self-esteem. And the physical resemblance convinces. (Wilde didn't become really plump until after his release from prison.)

A word about Fry's voice. It is full without a trace of plumminess, a "normal" speaking voice yet with an always available richness just below it. His first three words in the film are "How very kind," and when I heard the word "kind" dropped in, differently resonant, after the first two words, I suspected that this performance was going to be a treat. Which it is.

The opening credits are bordered with Aubrey Beardsley drawings, a clever little deceit because the opening shot sweeps us into the American West, galloping horses and all. Wilde is in Leadville, Colorado, in 1882. The screenplay doesn't explain that he was on an American lecture tour, but it does let him descend into a silver mine where, elegantly dressed and spoken, he makes friends with the miners.

Then we're in London, with Wilde marrying. The rest of the film could be called the results of that marriage. Julian Mitchell's screenplay, drawn from the definitive biography by Richard Ellmann, deals justly with the marriage. Wilde loves his wife, a generous and patient woman, and loves his two sons. (The family scenes are linked by Wilde's reading of "The Selfish Giant," one of the tales he invented for his children.) But these loves were not all of him, not even the major part, as he fairly soon found out through a young friend named Robert Ross, whom he also loves. Then came Bosie—Lord Alfred Douglas, the young beauty who enraptured and tortured Wilde and led him into the underworld of gay life. And then came Bosie's father, the Marquess of Queensberry, who tried to rescue his son from Wilde's clutches when in fact most of the clutching was the other way around.

It's generally thought that Queensberry was a crude philistine, a huntin' shootin' brute with no trace of intellect or sensitivity; but, precisely because this film doesn't attempt to mitigate matters, we can see him in an additional light. Consider the period. How many fathers of the 1890s, even cultivated ones, would not have tried—as they saw it then—to

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Marius and Jeannette. *Set in the present but immersed in the social attitudes of 1930s French drama. Still, there's much beauty in this account of Marseilles working-class love. (Reviewed 5/4/98)* **Primary Colors.** *Campaigning with Bill and Hillary under other names. Speed and candor and wit, plus John Travolta's amiability and Emma Thompson's sparkle. But its credibility depresses a bit. (4/20/98)* **Taste of Cherry.** *Another gift of lasting worth from the Iranian master, Abbas Kiarostami. A taciturn story of a man contemplating suicide. We explore some secrets, including the secret of the film's very being. (4/13/98)* **Wild Man Blues.** *Barbara Kopple's documentary of Woody Allen's 24-day tour of European cities, playing clarinet with his jazz band. Allen is more ingratiating here than in most of his acting roles. (5/11/98)* **—SK**

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rescue their sons from homosexual depravity? Queensberry today might be a case for treatment. In his own day he seems a coarse instance of a general opinion.

Mitchell indeed gives Queensberry, with Wilde, one of the most telling scenes in the picture. Bosie insists on introducing his father to Wilde at the Café Royal and leaves them to lunch together. Mitchell has devised the dialogue, for a meeting only briefly described by Ellmann, with insight and grace. Wilde is so subtle that Queensberry later tells Bosie that he thought Wilde charming. But the relationship still revolts the marquess, and he leaves that notorious provocative card at Wilde's club. Wilde, against any need or sense, insists on suing for libel.

Queensberry is acquitted and, as a result of matters he adduced in his defense, Wilde is arrested. After two trials—the first jury disagreed—Wilde was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for his sexual behavior. (In *De Profundis*, the immense letter he wrote to Bosie from prison, he indicts the younger man for persuading him to bring the first legal action. I still believe, as I wrote in 1960, that "Wilde, who for all his bohemianism was an Irish Victorian of strong religious bent, willed his own punishment." Somewhere deep in him was a wish to be discovered and chastised.)

Wilde comes out of prison determined not to see Bosie again. The film ends with their remeeting. Omitted are the three years before his death in Paris in 1900, three somewhat desperately bacchanalian years.

Brian Gilbert, who directed a film about T.S. Eliot and his wife called *Tom and Viv*, has treated this Wilde film with delicacy and perception. The cast is flawless. Jennifer Ehle (daughter of Rosemary Harris) gives substance to Constance Wilde. Michael Sheen, as Robert Ross, is a loyal Horatio to his harried prince. Jude Law is the ideal Bosie, a male beauty, high-spirited, vicious, appealing. In her few brief scenes as Wilde's mother, Vanessa Redgrave does what she can. The surprising, unsettling performance is by Tom Wilkinson, last seen in *The Full Monty*. He plays Queensberry with such abrasive authenticity that he becomes something more than a stock stupid boor.

For those who know Ellmann's biography, this film has nothing factually new. (It does have, besides condensation, some changes. For instance, it was not Ada Leverson who met Wilde when he came out the prison gate.) But a biographical film's function is not necessarily new material, it is embodiment. Aided by every cinematic resource, including Nic Ede's almost palpable costumes, *Wilde* succeeds.

Note. Last week I said that Primo Levi's *The Truce* is unavailable. It's available under another title, *The Reawakening*.

The Pluralist

BY TOMAS VENCLOVA

The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin by Caryl Emerson

(Princeton University Press, 293 pp., $29.95)

Remarkable men and women do not usually appear one at a time. They come in clusters and constellations. In the first half of the twentieth century, Russia produced an unbelievably bright constellation of talents. Their contribution to world culture was virtually unmatched. For an adequate comparison, one must look to the Florence of the Quattrocento or the Vienna of Haydn and Mozart. Poets and writers, critics and philosophers prevailed in the amazing Russian cohort, but there were also painters, musicians, stage directors, singers, dancers, and many others. Most of them were born within the span of a single decade: Boris Pasternak (1890), Osip Mandelstam and Sergei Prokofiev (1891), Marina Tsvetaeva (1892), Vladimir Mayakovsky and Victor Shklovsky (1893), Isaak Babel (1894), Roman Jakobson (1896), and Vladimir Nabokov (1899).

Thus the last decade of our own century is marked by a long series of Russian centennials. They are poignant for two reasons. First, the heyday of Russian culture was cut short by Leninism and Stalinism in the most dramatic and brutal way. All the stars and the planets of the constellation were extinguished by a variety of methods: some were shot or destroyed in the camps, like Mandelstam and Babel; some were hounded to death, like Pasternak and Tsvetaeva; some were virtually broken by the curtailment of their work, like Prokofiev and Shklovsky; and some were forced to emigrate, like Jakobson and Nabokov. Most of them became "non-persons." The very mention of them could bring trouble. (Mayakovsky, for irony's sake, was mentioned with such merciless frequency that the younger generation soon lost all interest in him.)

Only in the final years of the Soviet regime did the old names arise from the underground where their memory had been preserved, against incredible odds. And then communism collapsed. After decades of control and supervision, Russia became one of the freest countries in the world. In this environment of budding and anarchic capitalism, however, art and philosophy were marginalized. Those who had esteemed the former "non-persons," who had hoped for their immediate sanctification, suddenly found their idols considered irrelevant by most of the public. In this new climate, the centennials often fell flat, and the old heroes were targeted by disrespectful (or just disoriented) attacks.

This vulgarity may be painful, but it is better, and less mendacious, than official praise. Mikhail Bakhtin is a good case in point. He, too, belonged to this group of men and women of genius. Born in 1895, he was an obscure and ignored philosopher during most of his lifetime. At the end of his life, and immediately after his death in 1975, he became a sort of intellectual guru and cult figure. Yet his hagiography is now, suddenly, a thing of the past.

Bakhtin's centennial was marked in Russia by a host of conferences, mostly in provincial towns, and by many books and articles, of which usually a negligible number of copies were printed. In those books and articles, his legacy was discussed in considerable depth, but more often than not it was subjected to scathing (and sometimes stupid) criticism. I suspect that Bakhtin himself would have enjoyed it. He was fond of what he called, in his analysis of literature, "mock crowning and decrowning." He was also happy to find himself in a marginal position, which usually made his thought even more idiosyncratic and provocative.

Caryl Emerson is arguably the most knowledgeable and gifted Bakhtin scholar in the United States. She has already produced several works on him, including the groundbreaking study *Mikhail*

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Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics (1990), written together with Gary Saul Morson. Her elegant new book, which refers to Bakhtin's centennial in its very title, is, as she puts it, a history of "Bakhtin's reception by his own culture—undertaken by an outsider to that culture." To define herself as an outsider is excessively modest. Emerson deals with Russian history and culture with admirable ease; she is at home in areas that many native scholars would consider unfamiliar and esoteric.

The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin is, first and foremost, an extensive overview of recent Russian polemics concerning Bakhtin's ideas. Yet it is more than that. It provides us with fascinating glimpses of his life and his character, and with a history of his intellectual career in Russia and in the West, and with a serious discussion of the problematic areas of his thought. After giving the reader a clear picture of recent Russian criticism on Bakhtin, Emerson proceeds to her own opinions, which, as a rule, are very well-reasoned and tend toward the golden mean.

In contrast to most of his great contemporaries, Bakhtin was "a man without biography." At the end of his life, he recounted the story of his life to Viktor Duvakin, a semi-dissident literary historian, but these dialogues with Duvakin, which appeared in Russian in book form in 1996, are evasive and somewhat disappointing. Bakhtin was born to a noble and well-to-do family—this became a handicap after the October revolution—and studied in Odessa and St. Petersburg, focusing his attention on philosophy. (His elder brother Nikolai emigrated, and became a minor philosopher and a friend of Wittgenstein.) When revolution struck, Bakhtin moved to the small provincial town of Nevel, and later to the slightly larger town of Vitebsk. By a strange twist of fate, Vitebsk at that time was one of the world capitals of art. There Casimir Malevich worked, seconded by a local named Marc Chagall. Bakhtin knew both of them, though he did not say anything particularly revealing to Duvakin about their acquaintance.

In Nevel, as well as in Vitebsk, Bakhtin established informal philosophical circles, and wrote his early works, on the theory of discourse and ethics. Though the atmosphere in Soviet Russia at that time was a bit less stifling than it would soon become, he published just a small part of what he wrote. (These writings began to emerge from his archive only recently.) One should add that in provincial towns in the 1920s ideological surveillance was less pervasive than in Moscow or St. Petersburg, though it was sometimes cruder. Bakhtin could give public lectures that smacked of idealism, and even discuss religious problems openly.

He was luckier than many others. Though he underwent many trials, he was a survivor. Some have compared him to Pasternak's Doctor Zhivago, whose name means "the Living One" in Church Slavic. To the best of his abilities, Bakhtin avoided collaboration with the Soviet regime, but he also abstained from challenging it. He cherished the hope of finding a niche in the new reality, a situation that would permit him to live and to work without betraying his conscience—and he succeeded in the end, however strange it may sound. As Emerson points out, Bakhtin was utterly free of the mentality of the victim. He also never aspired to stardom. A self-effacing and impractical man, suffering from osteomyelitis which permanently handicapped him, Bakhtin was the opposite of the flamboyant people who enjoyed the limelight in early Soviet times, and whose very visibility contributed to their demise.

In 1924, Bakhtin returned to St. Petersburg (it was already called Leningrad), where he continued his philosophical pursuits. Wary of any institutional affiliations, he remained almost unknown outside a small group of friends, mainly his acquaintances from Nevel days. Debating ideas in private was Bakhtin's preference. When he decided to offer some of his ideas to a larger audience, he did so in an uncommon manner. Between 1927 and 1929, three books appeared. The first of them was a philosophical critique of Freudianism (a quite fashionable doctrine in Soviet Russia at the time); the second was a stringent critical analysis of Formalism in literary studies; and the third was a study of modern currents in linguistics from an ostensibly Marxist point of view.

These works were obviously different from the primitive stuff that was being crammed into people's brains in the form of Bolshevik philosophy. They drew their strength from an independent system of thought, the contours of which could be inferred from their wary pages. So wary, indeed, that Bakhtin's name was nowhere in evidence: the books were signed by his friends and interlocutors Valentin Voloshinov and Pavel Medvedev. Indeed, their authorship is still a matter of dispute. Some historians attribute them to Bakhtin: in their opinion, he published them under disguise partly to satisfy his taste for making himself inconspicuous, partly to deceive the censors. (Voloshinov and Medvedev seemed less vulnerable at the time.) Emerson belongs to the so-called "non-conflationists" who assign these books to their signatories. Still, it is clear enough that the philosophical system underlying the books was primarily Bakhtin's. It had crystallized under his strong influence, in a dialogical exchange of ideas.

The first book that appeared under Bakhtin's name, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, was dedicated to the problem of "dialogism," that is, to the sort of dynamic intellectual discourse that is inseparable from personal interaction. The fate of this book was unique. Published in 1929, it was attacked by forgettable Soviet critics as non-materialist and non-Marxist. (Dostoyevsky was himself becoming a bugaboo: a reactionary, an obscurantist, and so on.) Anatoly Lunacharsky, a liberal Bolshevik and the People's Commissar of Education, was a bit more indulgent, because he did not understand the text in full. And Lunacharsky's misreading of Bakhtin may have saved Bakhtin's life. In 1929, Bakhtin was arrested, together with other members of an unofficial circle connected with the Church. His book, and Lunacharsky's guardedly favorable review, actually appeared after the arrest (a jumble unimaginable in the later Stalinist period). Owing to poor health, and to the whiff of approval in Lunacharsky's article, and also to the intercession of Maxim Gorky, Bakhtin was spared prison camp. Instead he was exiled to Kazakhstan. (Several years later such clemency also became unthinkable.) His book was suppressed and forgotten.

After serving his five-year term, Bakhtin found employment in the provincial city of Saransk (not far from Potma, which was notorious for its prison camps for political offenders). Once again he was incredibly lucky. At the height of the Stalinist purges, he became a teacher in the local pedagogical institute; and he continued in his inconspicuous duties in that inconspicuous place after World War II. (He spent some time teaching German and Russian in the even smaller town of Savelovo.) In a sense, Bakhtin's position was like that of Solzhenitsyn, who also become a provincial teacher after his imprisonment. Yet Solzhenitsyn was a fighter whose books, written in secret during his stint in the school, contributed mightily to the collapse of the Soviet system. Bakhtin was animated by a different ideal of honorable behavior. He simply ignored the system and refused to be a part of its power structure. He did present a lecture on Stalin's linguistic studies, but he never harmed, coerced, or silenced others.

In 1940, not yet fully rehabilitated, Bakhtin managed to submit a disserta-

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tion on Rabelais to the Gorky Institute in Moscow. In this work, he developed the second concept which, together with dialogism, was to become his trademark: "the carnivalesque," by which he meant to describe the mentality that utilizes a specific language stressing the body and its processes, such as devouring, digesting, and sexual activity. According to him, the carnivalistic body was "unfinished and open," blended "with the world, with animals, with objects," representing "the entire material bodily world in all its elements." It also represented the people as a whole. "Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal."

The official response to Bakhtin's dissertation was mixed, even if its emphasis on collectivist values and on the subverting of feudal ideology, as well as its anticlerical tinge, might have been construed as politically correct. Some readers considered Bakhtin's thesis as fulfilling the requirements for a *doktorat*, the highest scholarly degree in the Soviet Union, but he was awarded only the candidate degree, analogous to the American Ph.D. (It was not until 1951 that he received it.) After Stalin's death in 1953, he continued to live in Saransk, in relative peace and comfort by Soviet standards, and in almost perfect obscurity.

The turn came in the 1960s. As early as 1956, indeed, Bakhtin was publicly described as a great scholar and thinker by Roman Jakobson, a Russian émigré and one of the founding fathers of Structuralism, during his first trip to the Soviet Union. At the same time, slightly more liberal rules were introduced in many Soviet libraries, and Bakhtin's suppressed book on Dostoyevsky became more available. The first Moscow students who came across it were sure that its author had died long ago. Eventually several of them discovered the truth, and met Bakhtin, and became his fervent adherents. In 1963, the book was reprinted in a revised and enlarged edition. In 1965, the dissertation on Rabelais also appeared.

Finally, in 1972, at the age of 77, and three years before his death, Bakhtin was granted official permission to live in Moscow. He was recognized as a major cultural figure by virtually every serious scholar in Russia. He was lionized by a circle of young admirers. He was already enjoying a burgeoning reputation—it was soon to become a frantic fad—in the West. He spent his last days in a two-bedroom apartment that he acquired with his royalties, lying on a couch, immersed in endless dialogue with numerous visitors. That was the happy end.

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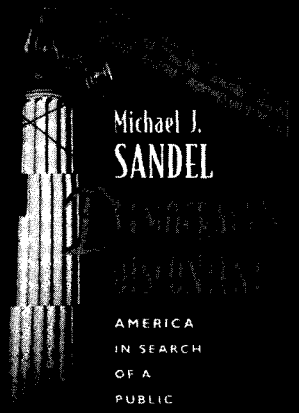

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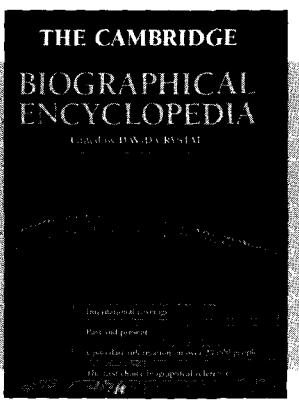

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The reappearance of Bakhtin's works fit into the general pattern of de-Stalinization. In the early 1960s, there was a movement among Soviet literary professionals aimed at loosening the constraints of dogmatic Marxism-Leninism. The reclamation of pre-Stalin culture was cautious, but it was gaining strength. An important facet of that culture was the legacy of the Russian Formalists and early Structuralists, such as Jakobson, Shklovsky, and Vladimir Propp. Tartu University in Estonia (which was then a part of the Soviet Union) became the center for a group of young scholars who developed a rigorous methodology in the humanities, developing the ideas of these illustrious predecessors; and the exactness of their procedures made the dogmatic Marxist approach look obsolete and funny. No wonder that the Party treated them with suspicion. But they were helped by the relatively liberal climate in the Baltics, and by Tartu's marginality (another instance of the old rule that worked in Bakhtin's favor in Nevel and Vitebsk).

Along with the Formalists, Bakhtin became a bridge between two eras. Yet he subscribed to a different tradition, related not to positivism with its scientific ambitions, but to Russian religious philosophy. He was deliberately imprecise, and he preferred creativity to rigor. Indeed, he distinguished himself as a critic of Formalism in his youth. For this reason, he was claimed by another group, the so-called "lyricists," who insisted on the organic character of art and its resistance to any strict analysis.

In those days the provincial cities Tartu and Saransk formed a sort of bipolar structure. A tension developed between the poles, reflecting not only the difference of methodologies, but also the old Russian conflict between "Westernizers" and "Slavophiles," liberals and conservatives. The Tartu group was interested in Bakhtin's ideas, and even influenced by them to a significant degree. Its leader, Yury Lotman, corresponded with Bakhtin for many years. But genuine scholarly interaction was soon obscured and partly replaced by ugly factional fighting, initiated by "Slavophiles" who did not refrain from making allies with official Soviet ideologues and attacking the "Westernizers" in almost Stalinist terms.

In his final years, Bakhtin was unable to distinguish the dishonest figures from the honest ones. He attracted not only respectable humanists, but also people of ambiguous reputation, aggressive nationalists, born-again Orthodox Christians, and obscurantists who mythologized him madly, and used his reputation to promote their hidden agendas. After Bakhtin's death, some "Slavophiles," such as Vadim Kozhinov, tried their best to remake him in their own image, turning him into an anti-internationalist and virtually an anti-Semite. As Emerson points out, Bakhtin was in their view a super-Russian thinker who could never have been influenced by Kant or the Neo-Kantians, since he was unswervingly loyal to the native Church elders of the fifteenth century. (His writings on that obnoxious Frenchman Rabelais were just a diversion and a disguise, a way of drawing attention away from his true interest in Orthodox saints and holy fools.) The Westernizers, according to Kozhinov and his kin, expropriated Bakhtin and distorted him for their own impious needs: his dialogism was surely a genuinely Russian trait.

All this, of course, was rubbish. Everybody who reads Bakhtin without prejudice sees immediately that, like any civilized Russian of his times, he was aware of Western culture and fascinated by it. He was also far from being a saint and a true believer, and he did not want to be considered as such. Less amusing is the fact that the "Slavophiles" took hold of Bakhtin's unpublished writings; and they saw to it that his works would make their way to press only selectively. His books on Dostoyevsky and Rabelais have the status of manifest, if controversial, classics; but there still is no critical edition of Bakhtin's work. His legacy reaches readers in disjointed, incomplete, and sometimes distorted form, like Nietzsche's legacy at the beginning of the century.

Following Lotman and others, Emerson distinguishes two currents in Bakhtin studies, Bakhtinistics and Bakhtinology. The terms are slightly ironic, but there is a significant difference between the two camps. Bakhtinistics is the sober study of Bakhtin as a literary scholar and a philosopher, in the tradition of Tartu—it approaches him with interest and with respect, but without reverence and mystification. After Lotman's death, this approach has been represented, among others, by the eminent Russian philologist Mikhail Gasparov, a patron of Bakhtin's counter-cult. Bakhtinology, by contrast, attempts to transform Bakhtin into a master, a guru, a metaphysical figure transcending scholarship and philosophy and bordering on prophecy. In the words of one Russian scholar, it teaches "how salvation is possible with the help of Bakhtin." The founding fathers of Bakhtinology—it is really Bakhtinolatry—are the old "Slavophiles" of Kozhinov's bent. It is no wonder that these excesses provoke many efforts to demythologize Bakhtin, which sometimes also verge on the grotesque.

The West has its own variety of Bakhtinology. Before Gorbachev, Bakhtin was much more extensively and openly discussed in France, the United States, and elsewhere than in Russia, where such discussions were hindered by censorship. Thanks to Julia Kristeva and others, Bakhtin became a patron saint of poststructuralism and all kinds of deconstructionist, feminist, postcolonial, and multicultural criticism. (Graham Pechey applied Bakhtin's notion of the "body's transgressive lower half" to an entire continent, and attached dialogizing and carnivalizing Latin America to the genital and anal sphere.) This radical Western response to Bakhtin is outside the scope of Emerson's book. In her opinion, as in my own, it has generated some valuable notions and a great deal of nonsense. Western followers of Bakhtin, as Emerson states, tend to make him into a political activist, which he never was, and into a moral relativist, which he never was. In the East he is often considered as a paragon of moral obligation, which he never was. Emerson admirably avoids all these traps.

Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, or "polyphony," was formulated in his book on Dostoyevsky as a theory of the novel, though its implications extend beyond the world of literary study. Bakhtin's idea of the novel is a very peculiar one: in his view, Plato's dialogues are novels, while the book-length stories by Turgenev and Dickens, are not novels. Dostoyevsky's work, in Bakhtin's analysis, was the watershed event in the genre's history, even if some traits of his novels may be traced to the literary forms of earlier times, including the ancient *menippea* (a sort of satire employing burlesque and parodistic effects). The important fact, according to Bakhtin, is that there is no authorial, overbearing voice in Dostoyevsky's novel—which is to say, in the novel as it should be.

For Dostoyevsky juxtaposes points of view that are never subordinated to any single or monological perspective. There are many voices of heroes, and many ideas which choose heroes as their carriers. But the writer does not prevail over the hero. Instead, they define each other in their interaction. Their relationship is somewhat analogous to the relationship between God and humanity as it is assumed in Christian theology. The hero can disobey and surprise the writer, just as the human being, endowed with freedom, can disobey and even puzzle God. Dostoyevsky's characters are the bearers of different truths; their voices embody

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different ethical positions which are tested in the course of a novel. In his art, in short, there is a continuous renegotiation of opinion. (A very Western attitude, by the way.)

For this reason, according to Bakhtin, the novel is the king of genres. In his early thinking, Bakhtin dismissed epic, lyric, and even drama as monological, and therefore constraining and imprisoning. (He believed that Byron's *Don Juan* and Ibsen's dramas were virtually novels in disguise.) As Emerson nicely puts it, the novel was, for Bakhtin, "the world's only freedom-bearing literary form," a constantly innovating, essentially anticanonical genre which exposed the artificiality of any system. Asymmetry, interruption, variety bordering on anarchy, a counterpoint of texts and languages disdaining any authoritative discourse: these are the novel's distinctive traits.

Bakhtin extended his ideas to the level of the word, or discourse, which he interpreted as a bundle of contradictory elements, as the arena of a continuous struggle for meaning. Generally, Bakhtin emphasized process over system; a response over a statement. In the realm of ethics—which was, for Bakhtin, inseparable from linguistics—this meant that a personality could grow only by interacting with other personalities, other consciousnesses, other voices. "In place of God, Bakhtin deified the everyday interlocutor," says Emerson, paraphrasing Bakhtin's student and friend Georgii Gachev. This was how Bakhtin read the Scriptural admonition "love thy neighbor as thyself." And dialogue was essentially interminable, which led to the arch-Bakhtinian category of "unfinalizability," according to which anything could give birth to something new and more fertile. Nothing should be—nothing could be—constrained by a strict code.

For young people in the Soviet Union, groping to find their own way in the 1960s, all this was much more than just an original interpretation of Dostoyevsky and his genre. I remember reading Bakhtin in a state of feverish excitement. Along with many others, I took his work to be a great manifesto of pluralism, a powerful rejection of the stifling ideology and the social stasis in the orbit of communism. One should not underestimate Bakhtin's impact, however indirect, on Soviet dissent.

His thinking was also in perfect accord with the embryonic postmodernist currents in Russian—and Western—thought and literature, even if the postmodernist notion of plurality is certainly not an ethical notion, as Bakhtin's was. Today, however, critics in Russia and elsewhere submit Bakhtin's "dialogism" to an examination that it does not always pass. Emerson's book recounts this examination in much detail.

It now seems, for a start, that Dostoyevsky is not a good example for an unfinalizable and fruitful dialogue. In his works, there is a strong "authority principle," which points to the one and absolute truth. It is true that Bakhtin never addressed such problems as silence in Dostoyevsky's novels. (Bakhtin's universe is an auditory one; he has no feeling for visual images, which may be more significant in Dostoyevsky than words.) Also, he too easily dismissed Dostoyevsky's violence. Lingering over his beloved writer, Bakhtin remained uninterested in the cruelty, the hostility, and the malignancy that are so apparent in *Crime and Punishment* or *The Idiot*. Instead of being open and dialogical, many of Dostoyevsky's characters are isolated in their violent selves. Bakhtin did not take into account the horrible death scenes in Dostoyevsky. In death, after all, dialogue ends: there is nothing negotiable or "unfinalizable" here, and for that reason, death becomes irrelevant in Bakhtin's interpretation.

The critics also charge—and here we leave the literary world of Dostoyevsky for broader social and ethical problems—that the verbal dialogue that was idealized by Bakhtin can be flat, and forced, and lacking in depth. It may not always enrich; it may deceive, and lead astray. It may also allow words to substitute for deeds. Thus the postmodernist artist Ilya Kabakov dismisses Bakhtinian dialogue as empty chatter, smacking even of Stalinist blah-blah-blah. Some Conceptualist critics even compare it to the confessions of "enemies of the people" in Stalin's purges, where words stood for everything, in particular for legal proofs. "Unfinalizability" may be easily construed as an evasion of responsibility.

Emerson mounts a convincing defense of Bakhtin's idea of dialogue. She points out that Bakhtin never believed that words may transform reality. (In this he differed from his contemporaries the Symbolists and the Futurists, who believed in the magical power of the word, as well as from the Bolsheviks, who attempted to control life by the manipulation of signs.) He had a different goal: he strove to overcome simplified linear thinking by introducing a multiplicity of perspectives. This meant, above all, an emphatic rejection of dogmatism. In the opinion of the Bakhtinist Boris Egorov, such a pluralist and multiperspectival

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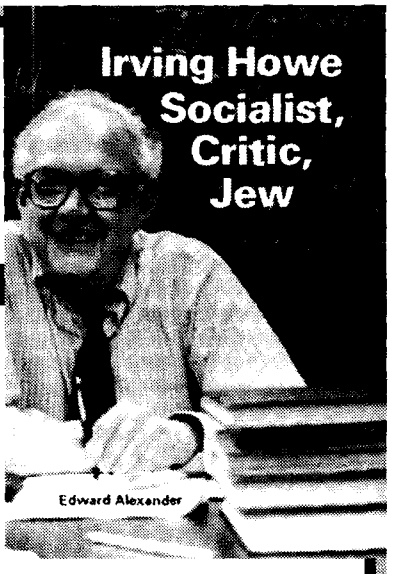

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model was inspired by the theory of relativity (and I would add that it also accorded with the Cubist revolution in art).

Yet Bakhtin did not accept relativity in the realm of morality. For him, the "age of relativity" challenged the human being more, not less, than the age of dogmatic norms. Everything is decidedly not permitted, however strongly the Ivan Karamazovs and the Smerdiakovs insist otherwise. Quite the contrary. Our responsibility became greater when our single standard fell away. While Bakhtin rejected dogmas, moreover, he did not reject religion, as a binding force between individuals. Religion, for him, was a counterweight to relativism. (This was almost too obvious to mention.)

Bakhtin might have underestimated the violent element and the tragic element in Dostoyevsky, but he did not overestimate the power of the dialogue. He knew that dialogue does not guarantee forward movement. It merely opens up the possibility of forward movement, even for a man as isolated as Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, who finally interacts with "the other" in the person of Sonia and enters the realm of public dialogue through his confession. Nor does dialogical interaction lead to some final and irrevocable "triumph of truth." For truth cannot triumph without becoming a dogma, a totalitarian lie. Bakhtin was more profound than his critics suppose.

Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque is even more controversial. If dialogue represents human consciousness, the daylight side of human life, then the carnival represents the subconscious, the nocturnal side. Bakhtin postulated the existence of a specific "bodily language," emphasizing eating, excrement, and sex; and he saw its embodiment primarily, though not exclusively, in the rituals of the medieval carnival, which were related to the ancient Saturnalia. In this, he was heavily influenced by Nietzsche (and probably also by Freud's oral-anal-genital triad). Carnival laughter, according to Bakhtin, subverted classical form, as well as social hierarchy and oppression. In it, all oppositions and divisions were deconstructed, including the dichotomy of thought and matter.

As the Russian critic Natalia Bonetskaia has noted, Bakhtin's book on Rabelais was a kind of refutation of his book on Dostoyevsky, since in it the "carnival spirit" and the constantly renewing collective "folk body" substituted for the writer and the hero respectively. The "carnivalistic mentality" could be interpreted as a materialist notion, more or less compatible with the Soviet version of Marxism. For people of my generation, however, it signified the opposite. It was a subversion of Soviet officialese. It was no wonder that the Soviet authorities figured out that carnival laughter was more threatening to them than dialogical polyphony. Dialogue raised the specter of a parliament, but carnival raised the specter of a revolution.

For many critics, the theory of the carnival, like the theory of the Oedipus complex several decades earlier, became a master-key that opened all doors. Notwithstanding the censors, Bakhtin's concept was widely applied in literary and cultural studies in the Soviet Union. And some Russian scholars recognized its weaknesses early enough. The outraged reaction of the old philosopher Aleksei Losev, who deplored Bakhtin's infantile fascination with excrement (and with that obscene Western devil Rabelais), was merely bizarre; but the medievalist Aron Gurevich and the dissident thinker Grigory Pomerants criticized Bakhtin more convincingly. They observed that the medieval carnival was a safety valve rather than an instrument of subversion; that the upper (and literate) strata were never alien to the carnival mentality; that the "collective body" of the common people could become oppressive and fanatical, and the carnival grotesque could become a new and cruel canon. (Bakhtin, incidentally, did not know much about the carnival as it really was: he sought inspiration not in historiography and ethnography, but in several pages on Roman carnival by Goethe.)

For Bakhtin, certainly, the theory of the carnival was never a master-key. Lotman and his group justly criticized those "Slavophile" scholars who conflated the Rabelaisian carnival with native Russian phenomena, such as the institution of holy fools, or the all-powerful police of Ivan the Terrible, who practiced a grotesque code of conduct. According to Lotman and his followers, "carnivalistic" behavior in the West might be a regular part of the social mechanism, but in medieval Russia it could exist only on the very margins of society, as extreme humility or as satanic blasphemy.

What invites the most suspicion is Bakhtin's Romantic mythologization of "the people's laughter" and "the people's body." The carnivalesque can justify too much. Here, too, Bakhtin's lack of interest in tragedy and his underestimation of violence comes to the fore. Sergei Averintsev and others point out that "carnival laughter" may be far from life-affirming and renewing. It may be diabolical, as in the merciless, senseless laughter of a Fascist mob, which sacrifices "the other" in the name of "authenticity."

This line of thought reached its extreme in the mindboggling divagations of Mikhail Ryklin, the leading Russian postmodernist, who interprets the very idea of carnival as an exorcism for the trauma caused by Stalin's purges. Thus the praise of carnival, and of the collective body that literally devours the individual, may be construed as a particularly insidious justification of Stalinist terror. In the eyes of Ryklin and like-minded critics, Bakhtin belongs in the ranks of Stalin's ideologues, who condemned "bourgeois liberalism" as rupture from the collectivist body and enjoyed its destruction.

Emerson notes, rightly, that this is an awful simplification. Bakhtin was aware of Stalinist mythology and he was appalled by its evil. He knew that Stalinist folk culture, prescribed from above, was an abominable parody of authentic folk culture. The carnivalistic mentality, for him, could not exist without a genuinely religious framework. And his notion of the people as a "collective body," hardly a totalitarian idea, was rooted in an Old Testament understanding of genealogy, culture, and transcendence. (It was promoted also by other Russian thinkers, notably Andrei Bely, long before Stalin's rule.) The American Slavicist Alexandar Mihailovic has recently remarked upon another link between the "carnivalistic mentality" and the Bible: that Bakhtin's affirmation of matter and flesh is related to the Christian doctrine of incarnation. Here Bakhtin followed the Russian religious philosophers of the early twentieth century, as well as Osip Mandelstam.

It is difficult for us to understand Bakhtin fully, since we have lost the language of his times, the idiosyncratic language of philosophy that had developed in pre-revolutionary and early post-revolutionary Russia in close connection with Western (especially Neo-Kantian) trends, as well as with the ancient Greek tradition. The most demanding part of Emerson's book deals with Bakhtin's philosophical heritage—his notions of *vnenakhodimost*, or "outsideness," and *inonauka*, or (this is a little awkward) "science in some other way."

The concept of "outsideness" was proposed in the early and lesser known works of Bakhtin: it preceded and, in a sense, subsumed his more popular idea of dialogue. For Bakhtin, as for other philosophers of his day, the I existed only on the border between itself and the other. It seems that Bakhtin was particularly impressed by the theory of Self and Other promoted by the Symbolist poet Vyacheslav Ivanov (which led Ivanov to rather risky erotic experiments). Bakhtin's "doctrine of outsideness" began as a

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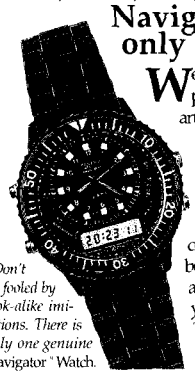

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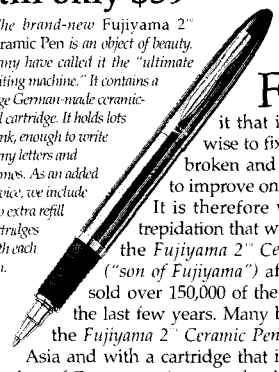

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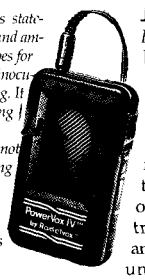

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concept in aesthetics, but later it developed into a full-fledged theory of love (in a more traditional Christian key than Ivanov).

According to Bakhtin, the aesthetic task presents a paradigm for the task of love (as well as for other human tasks). The beloved person is, in a sense, a work of art, since he or she requires me, the outsider, in order to become coherent, integral, "whole." "Outsidedness" is not isolation, it is a surplus of vision. Conversely, the other sees me more stably and more fully than I see myself. Love never empties or kills, it refines and enriches. But it is a difficult labor. (The philosopher who comes to mind here is Martin Buber, also an explorer of the "I-Thou" relation; but Bakhtin, as Emerson points out, was more secular than Buber.)

Bakhtin was not a professional philosopher, and certainly not an academic one. He was, as his critics note, a "thought-mongerer," comparable to Montaigne. His "science in some other way" may be understood as a philosophical anthropology stressing the role of the individual in the humanities. But finally Bakhtin slips away from all the frameworks. His characterization of the novel as anticanonical, as constantly redefining itself, could be applied to himself. He was the embodiment of "otherness": evasive, averse to authority and ideology, eclectic, sometimes incoherent, always provocative. He is impossible to pin down. A vast "Bakhtin industry" has been created, but Bakhtin cannot be taught in a formal way. It is he who remains "unfinalizable." Thus this great slippery author looms large before us as a paradigm of pluralism. This post-Socratean thinker who strayed into our age may have a considerable impact on the postmodern world of the next century, especially on his native Russia, which is still groping for liberalism, for dialogue, for a revitalization of thought and culture.

TOMAS VENCLOVA, a Lithuanian writer, is Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Yale. He is the author of *Aleksander Wat: Life and Art of an Iconoclast* (Yale) and *Winter Dialogue* (Northwestern).

More is Less

BY CASS R. SUNSTEIN

Seeing Like A State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed by James Scott

(Yale University Press, 445 pp., $35)

A German psychologist named Dietrich Dorner has done some fascinating experiments designed to see whether people can engage in successful social engineering. The experiments are run by a computer. Participants are asked to solve problems faced by the inhabitants of some region of the world: poverty, poor medical care, inadequate fertilization of crops, sick cattle, insufficient water, excessive hunting and fishing. Through the magic of the computer, many policy initiatives are available (improved care of cattle, childhood immunization, drilling more wells), and participants can choose among them. Once initiatives are chosen, the computer projects, over short periods of time and then over decades, what is likely to happen in the region.

In these experiments, success is entirely possible. Some initiatives will actually make for effective and enduring improvements. But most of the participants—even the most educated and the most professional ones—produce calamities. They do so because they do not see the complex, system-wide effects of particular interventions. Thus they may recognize the importance of increasing the number of cattle, but once they do that, they create a serious risk of overgrazing, and they fail to anticipate that problem. They may understand the value of drilling more wells to provide water, but they do not foresee the energy effects and the environmental effects of the drilling, which endanger the food supply. It is the rare participant who can see a number of steps down the road, who can understand the multiple effects of one-shot interventions into the system.

These computer experiments have countless real-world analogues. As everyone now knows, an unanticipated problem with mandatory airbags is that they result in the deaths of some children who would otherwise live. Less familiarly, new antiterrorist measures in airports increase the cost of air travel, thus leading people to drive instead, and driving is more dangerous than traveling by air, so more stringent antiterrorist measures may end up killing people. If government wants to make sure that nuclear power is entirely safe, it should impose tough controls on nuclear power, but those controls will increase the price of nuclear energy, which may well increase the use of fossil fuels, which may well create the more serious environmental problems.

The problems produced by selective interventions into complex systems have received a great deal of attention in recent years, in economics, in law, and in international relations. James Scott, a political scientist and an anthropologist, has now provided one of the most ambitious treatments of these problems, and probably the most unusual. Scott is an irrepressible analogizer, and his range is extremely wide. He connects such things as the ingenious "work-to-rule" strikes in Paris, where workers, determined to strike without striking, decided to follow, to the exasperating letter, all the written rules about work-related behavior, with the consequence that nothing could be done; the nineteenth-century movement for "scientific forestry," which tended to destroy forests; the hilariously failed effort to make Esperanto the world's official language; Lenin's misunderstandings of how a revolution really happens; Tanzania's catastrophic attempt to move its mobile population into stable villages; and clueless, utopian architectural schemes, designed to produce standardized and orderly cities, and culminating in the planned city of Brasilia. These and many other examples are linked by the failure of planners to understand the role of local, practical knowledge, and by the unpredictability of nature and society, which results from spontaneity, private adaptation, and efforts at informal coordination by those who are subjected to plans. In a way, Scott's book is a paean to human liberty, a very complicated paean.

Scott does not deny that some designs are well-motivated, and he acknowledges that plans can sometimes do a lot of good. He is concerned to show that when a government, with its "thin simplifications" of complicated systems, fails to understand how human beings organize (and disorganize) themselves, its plans are doomed from the start. Scott calls some governments practitioners of "high

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modernism," a recipe for many natural and social disasters, including tyranny. High-modernist ideology is self-confident about scientific and technical progress and "the mastery of nature (including human nature), above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws." Left to itself, this ideology is overconfident but benign. It becomes authoritarian when it is conjoined to "an authoritarian state that is willing and able to use the full weight of its coercive power to bring these high-modernist designs into being." This is especially dangerous when it is linked to "a prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans." Thus the greatest calamities in Scott's book involve a weak society that cannot adapt to a government's plans.

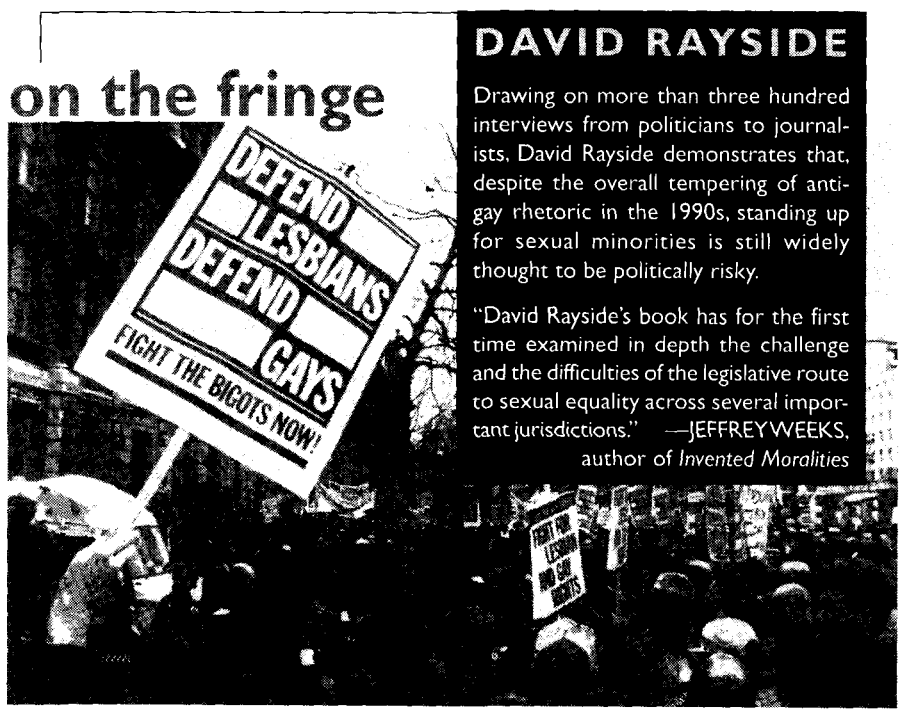
Scott begins with a discussion of what a state must know about its society in order to engage in basic managerial tasks. In Scott's formulation, a state must render society "legible" by producing uniform measures of various sorts: the production of maps, the creation of a uniform system of measurement (thus Scott traces the complex rise of meters), even the state-generated universal use of last names. People often consider these things inevitable; Scott shows that they are anything but. And, while nothing is necessarily wrong with these efforts at making society transparent to the state, they create risks. Scott's most striking example of legibility by maps was produced by the City Office of Statistics of Amsterdam while under Nazi occupation in May 1941. The map is called "The Distribution of Jews in the Municipality." It shows an entirely legible, synoptic representation of the city's Jewish population; but it was this map that ultimately guided the rounding up of Jews, 65,000 of whom were deported.

Any state that cares about economic development is likely to be committed to the use and the exploitation of natural resources. Hence Scott links the project of "legibility" to the rise of scientific forestry, through which European states sought to make forests legible—simple, clear, easily managed and understood—in order to maximize the revenue yield of extracted timber. To this end, scientific forestry sought to produce a new, stripped-down kind of forest, with strands of same-age trees arranged in linear alleys. And here was a state-created disaster, brought about through the failure to understand concrete details. To carry out this plan for revenue maximization, nations had to engage in a "thin simplification" of the underlying natural reality and indulge in a "heroic ... constriction of vision." Seeing forests solely as timber sources, states did not focus on a number of natural and social aspects of well-functioning forests: "foliage and its uses as fodder and thatch; fruits, as good for people and domestic animals; twigs and branches, as bedding, fencing, hop poles, and kindling; bark and roots, for making medicines and for tanning; sap, for making resins."

Scientific forestry did make everything simpler to manage; and in the short term the simplification of the forest to a single commodity was a success, in the sense that it increased the revenue yield of extracted timber. After the planting of a second rotation of conifers, however, things fell apart. "An exceptionally complex process involving soil building, nutrient uptake, and symbiotic relations among fungi, insects, mammals and flora—which were, and still are, not entirely understood—was apparently disrupted, with serious consequences." Thinner and less nutritious soils developed. Same-age, same-species forests turned out to be especially vulnerable to massive storm-felling. The uniformity of species and age created a specially favorable habitat for destructive pests. In the end, those who engaged in scientific forestry turned out to be very much like the bumbling participants in Dorner's computer experiments.

The next part of Scott's book treats what he calls "authoritarian high modernism." Scott defines high modernism, a generalization of scientific forestry, as "the aspiration to the administrative ordering of nature and society." In his view, this aspiration has been widely shared in the modern era across a wide spectrum of political ideologies. Its main carriers and exponents were "the avant-garde among engineers, planners, technocrats, high-level administrators, architects, scientists, and visionaries." Their project was to simplify and to rationalize society, with an eye toward managing it for the general good. To the high modernists, historical practice deserved scant attention, amounting to the accidental, irrational deposit of past conduct; and the rationalizers sought to eliminate that deposit. Scott's goal is to show that there is much good sense in that deposit, that planners eliminate it at their peril.

Much of this argument is accomplished by a discussion of Le Corbusier. He famously aspired to total city planning, based on scorn for the unruly, unscientific arrangements produced by centuries of spontaneous urban living. "His love (mania?) for simple, repetitive lines and his horror of complexity," writes Scott, accounted for the architect's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immense enthusiasm for the geometric logic of downtown Manhattan. (Those who love downtown Manhattan tend to emphasize things other than its "geometric logic.") In Scott's account, Le Corbusier's whole project culminated in the ambitious plans for Brasilia, the ultimate high-modernist city. The basic plan was for large public spaces and simple, geometrical designs. But all this produced a "disorienting quality ... exacerbated by architectural repetition and uniformity." Ultimately the real Brasilia was transformed from the original vision, by "resistance, subversion, and political calculation." Brasilia had the same relation to real cities as scientific forestry to real forests.

Scott thinks that Le Corbusier did not understand cities, in which the unscientific and the unruly are virtues rather than vices. If Le Corbusier is Scott's architectural villain, Scott's hero is Jane Jacobs, whose book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, which appeared in 1961, stands as a leading critique of high-modernist urbanism. Jacobs's challenge is rooted in her appreciation for the disorderly but highly adaptive ethnography of social order at the street level. Tidy geometric orders are very different from systems that meet daily needs. A visual order may not create a functional order, but a functional order is what is necessary for actual human lives. A fine example is Boston's North End, where peace and order come from a complex, informal network of social ties. The shopkeepers watch passersby; those who come on errands keep their eyes on the street. Though the system is unruly, and not easily legible, it works.

Attempting to understand revolutionary processes, Scott proposes a similar opposition between Lenin—Le Corbusier's soulmate, a political high modernist—and Rosa Luxemburg and Aleksandra Kollontai. Lenin was a committed planner. He believed that a revolution requires hierarchical control, centralized organization, a high degree of management and planning. Spontaneity was a dangerous obstacle, a problem to be overcome. Like Le Corbusier, Lenin admired centralized forms of bureaucratic coordination. But Luxemburg, an equally enthusiastic revolutionary, believed that this was all wrong, even foolish: a revolution depends on a high degree of creativity and initiative from below. In her view, advance planning would not only be undemocratic, it would also fail for having ignored the inevitability of surprise and complexity. Kollontai, a revolutionary activist and a constant thorn in Lenin's side, spoke in similar terms, envisaging revolutions as voyages on uncharted waters, for which, in Scott's words, "there can be no blueprints or battle plans drawn up in advance; the numerous unknowns in the equation make a one-step solution inconceivable."

Scott then moves on to discuss state efforts to engineer rural settlement and production. Soviet collectivization of agriculture is a central example. The basic project was "to take a social and economic terrain singularly unfavorable to appropriation and control and to create institutional forms and production units far better adapted to monitoring, managing, appropriating, and controlling from above." Thus the Bolsheviks tried to create a new landscape of large, hierarchical, state-managed farms that were subject to nationally dictated cropping patterns and procurement quotas. Collectivized agriculture, so understood, persisted for years. But the planners were clueless about the complexity of agricultural practices, and so ultimately it had enormous costs: "stagnation, waste, demoralization, and ecological failure." Thus the Bolshevik agriculturalists replicated the hubristic aspirations of scientific forestry, Le Corbusier, and Lenin himself.

Scott makes an illuminating distinction between the relatively solid performance of Soviet agriculture with respect to wheat and its dismal performance with respect to red raspberries. Wheat turns out to be well-suited to the thin simplifications of planners. Once wheat is planted, it needs little care until harvest, at which point it can be relatively simply cut and brought into trucks or railroad cars. It is also sturdy and easy to store. By contrast, the red raspberry bush needs a particular soil and spoils easily; without delicate handling, all is lost. The problem was that raspberries turned out to be typical. Thus fruits and vegetables failed in the Soviet's collective center and had to be produced by individual households, which were able to adapt to innumerable details that collective processes could not identify.

Scott finds a close parallel in efforts at compulsory "villagization" in Tanzania from 1973 to 1976. In this period, Tanzania's central government embarked on the massive project of permanently settling most of the country's population in villages. At the time, this was the largest forced resettlement attempt in independent Africa. President Nyerere argued that the goal of the move was to ensure that the majority of the people would not lead a "life of death." But rural Tanzanians, who had adapted to a more nomadic existence, were not at all happy with the plan, and their displeasure was quite reasonable. "As cultivators and pastoralists, they had developed patterns of settlement and, in many cases, patterns of periodic movements that were finely tuned adaptations to an often stingy environment which they knew exceptionally well. The state-mandated movement threatened to destroy the logic of this adaptation."

The planned villages were intended to be simple and streamlined, in a way that was self-consciously intended to be a negation of the past. "This was the modern administrative village, and it was implicitly associated with a modern, disciplined, and productive peasantry." But the result was a disaster for agricultural production. Scott connects this point to the more general failures, in the developing world, of state-sponsored agriculture in the twentieth century. The problem is that successful programs in the industrialized West have been ill-adapted to the complexities of agricultural production in the less temperate nations, especially in Africa.

In the concluding part of his book, Scott draws general lessons. The broadest one involves "the natural and social failures of thin, formulaic simplifications imposed through the agency of state power." These simplifications accounted for apparently disparate phenomena: ecological damage, the social failure of the scientific city, the inevitable need for improvisations and strokes of luck in producing revolutions, the resort to desperate measures unforeseen and even prohibited by plans for agricultural collectivization in both Tanzania and the former Soviet Union. To understand these problems, Scott invokes a simple concept: that of practical or cunning intelligence, called *metis* in early Greek poetry and discussed under other names by later Greek philosophers, particularly Aristotle.

Scott understands *metis* as "a wide array of practical skills and acquired intelligence in responding to a constantly changing natural and human environment." In literature, the central example is Odysseus, who demonstrated *metis* through his ability to improvise to the complexities of ever-changing situations. The essence of *metis*—the characteristic that all these failed state projects disregard—is knowledge about when and how to apply rules of thumb to concrete situations. Good doctors, good riverboat pilots, good writers, and good joke-tellers have this knowledge; they do not proceed mechanically or by rules. So too, and importantly for Scott, with specialists who deal with emergencies and disasters. "Although there are rules of thumb that can be and are taught, each

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fire or accident is unique, and half the battle is knowing which rules of thumb to apply in which order and when to throw the book way and improvise." On Scott's view, high modernism produced social and natural disasters because its practitioners were guilty of a particular form of hubris. They did not see what they did not know; and what they did not know had everything to do with contingent, local, context-dependent facts.

Scott offers some simple lessons for planning. States should take small steps rather than large ones. Policies are apt to be more successful if they can be reversed once they start to go awry, and so good planners ensure reversibility. Officials should assume that there will be surprises, that things will inevitably turn out quite differently than anticipated. Human beings will be extremely inventive, and move in unexpected directions, some of them perhaps destructive to your plans. (This is not bad advice for people attempting to "plan" their lives as well.) In Scott's view, these lessons argue for *metis*-friendly institutions, that is, for institutions that are well-adapted to the inevitability of surprise, spontaneity, and informal innovations. Scott ends with three examples of the kinds of institutions he favors: democracy; the common law, a "set of procedures for continually adapting some broad principles to novel circumstances"; and (this, in Scott's view, is the best model) language itself, as "a structure of meaning and content that is never still and ever open to the improvisations of all its speakers."

This is an unusual book, and much of its value is owed to the details of the particular case studies, and to Scott's enthusiasm and ingenuity in seeing links among apparently different human projects. Yet his ingenuity may also be excessive. For each of Scott's cases is itself a combination of multiple elements, and it is not clear that all of them really involve the same kinds of failures. Scott is more an anthropologist than a political scientist, and his book may be best taken as a set of linked narratives rather than as a sustained argument. To the extent that he is arguing against hubristic tendencies in planning, his thesis is unobjectionable, but it is not especially arresting.

Some of Scott's passages cast doubt on the entire idea of exerting mastery over circumstance, but he offers no general argument to support that doubt. After all, some large-scale plans *do* work. It is easy to compose a catalogue of large-scale projects that seem to have succeeded: the Roman aqueducts; the attack on Jim Crow in the American South;

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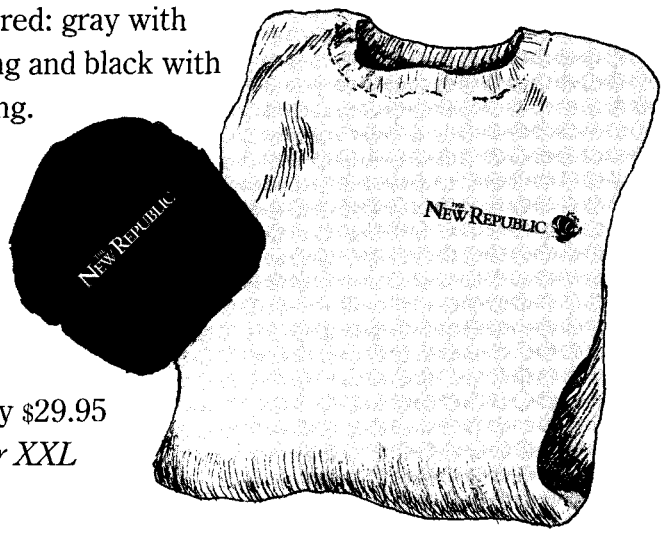

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St. Petersburg; the Erie Canal; the Manhattan Project; the Interstate Highway System; Franklin Delano Roosevelt's reshaping of the American economy for World War II; Haussmann's redesign of Paris; Washington, D.C. (and the Washington Metro); the nuclear submarine; the eradication of yellow fever, cholera, and polio; Century City; even the assault on air pollution in the major cities in the United States in the last two decades. Were these successes *metis*-friendly, and if so, how?

To get a more precise understanding of Scott's claims, it is useful to isolate two strands of thought that run through his discussion. The first comes from Hayek, the second comes from Aristotle. Acknowledging his debt to both, Scott melds the two strands together and adds several elements of his own.

Hayek was the twentieth century's sharpest critic of economic planning, especially in the form of price and wage controls. His idea was that government officials lack the information of the hundreds, thousands, or millions of people whose behavior becomes coordinated, by an invisible hand, in the market's determination of wages and prices. In an entirely Hayekian vein, Scott is also concerned with the lack of information faced by the government planner. A big problem with scientific planning, he asserts, is that the planner is not always a good scientist, because he lacks the knowledge of those on whom he imposes his plans. This idea unifies a number of Scott's illustrations. Yet Scott is no simple Hayekian, for he also thinks that "large-scale capitalism" is worthy of (neo-Hayekian?) criticism. In his view, large-scale capitalism

> is just as much an agency of homogenization, uniformity, grids, and heroic simplification as the state.... A market necessarily reduces quality to quantity via the price mechanism and promotes standardization; in markets, money talks, not people. Today, global capitalism is perhaps the most powerful force for homogenization, whereas the state may in some instances be the defender of local difference and variety.

Less Hayekian words have rarely been written. Scott seems to believe that market ordering can also be a form of "planning," producing unintended consequences of its own.

Scott's Aristotelian strand consists of an emphasis on the crudeness of general rules, and the need to adapt any such rules to the manifold particulars of the individual case. Aristotle spoke of the advantages of the Lesbian Ruler, which is able, unlike a straight-edge, to adapt its form to measure various shapes; and in this spirit Scott celebrates Jane Jacobs, Rose Luxemburg, Boston's North End, traditional farmers, and *metis* itself, as the capacity to see how to act in multiple contexts, all different from one another.

There is a link between the Hayekian and Aristotelian strands in Scott's emphasis on the informational deficit of state-generated rules—though Scott's Aristotelianism is prior to his Hayekianism, as confirmed by his ambivalence about the market. But Scott adds several features of his own. There is something both premodern and postmodern in several of his discussions—not much more than a whiff, perhaps, but certainly no less than that, in what sometimes appears to be a kind of general skepticism about science and technology, a hostility toward the modernist aspiration to understand and hence to master social practices. It is in this vein that Scott appears so nostalgic about the practices of traditional farmers, who have little idea why their improvisations work, but who know that they work, and who proceed accordingly:

> Tanzanian peasants had, for example, been readjusting their settlement patterns and farming practices in accordance with climate changes, new crops, and new markets with notable success.... Actual cultivators in West Africa and elsewhere should ... have been understood as lifelong experiments conducting in-field seasonal trials, the results of which they incorporated into their ever-evolving repertoire of practices.

This appreciation of unruly, spontaneous forms of ordering is central to Scott's narratives. Thus Scott has his own aesthetic, embodied in his appreciation of the elaborate, multicolored street worlds identified by Jacobs. He sees simplifications and plans as carrying with them the potential for a kind of death, mostly aesthetic or metaphorical but sometimes literal. Indeed, Scott sometimes seems to be only a sentimentalist, a nostalgist about old practices; and in these passages, certainly, his discussion seems less an argument than a mood. Consider also this revealing passage:

> [A] certain understanding of science, modernity, and development has so successfully constructed the dominant discourse that all other kinds of knowledge are regarded as backward, static traditions, as old wives' tales and superstitions. High modernism has needed this "other," this dark twin, in order to rhetorically present itself as the antidote to backwardness. This binary opposition also comes from a history of competition between the institutions and personnel that sprang up around these two forms of knowledge.

Of course there is truth in these passages; but anyone who opposes himself to "binary oppositions" is at risk of speaking postmodern nonsense.

The most sensible reading of what Scott has shown, and the reading that he himself favors in his best moments, is entirely rationalistic, even scientistic: an emphasis on human ignorance in the course of making plans and rules, an enthusiasm for improvisation, a recognition of people's creativity in adapting on the spot and over the course of time. In an important sentence, Scott writes that the real problem with the plans for villagification "is that such plans were not scientific or rational in any meaningful sense of those words. What these planners carried in their mind's eye was a certain aesthetic, what one might call a visual codification of modern rural production and community life." The difficulty with this codification is that "it was generalized and applied critically in widely divergent settings with disastrous results."

On Scott's view, the failed plans and the thin simplifications ignore information that turns out to be crucial. To be sure, an all-seeing computer, capable of handling all relevant information and envisioning the diverse consequences of different courses of action, may facilitate tyranny. But it need not blunder. This is the real lesson of Dorner's experiments, for which Scott has provided a wealth of real-world counterparts. And this is not the end of the story. Dorner also demonstrated the possibility of successful planning by those who are attuned to long-range effects. Scott's analysis would have been improved if he had compared success with failure, and given a clearer sense of the preconditions for success.

Still, Scott's advice is far from useless. It can be applied to contexts far afield from those that concern him here. His case studies help explain, say, why national regulation tends to work better when it consists of altered incentives rather than flat commands. Some of the most successful initiatives in American regulatory law have consisted of efforts to increase the price of high-polluting activities; and some of the least successful have been rigid mandates that ignore the collateral effects of regulatory controls. Scott's enthusiasm for *metis* also suggests that certain governmental institutions will do best if they act incrementally, creating large-scale change not at once, but in a series of lesser steps. We might think here not only of common law, but also of constitutional law. Many judicial problems derive from a belief that judges can intervene successfully in large-scale systems (consider the

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struggles with school desegregation in the 1960s and 1970s), and many judicial successes have come from proceeding incrementally (consider the far more incremental and cautious attack on sex discrimination in the same period).

And Scott also offers larger implications. A society that is legible to the state is susceptible to tyranny, if it lacks the means to resist that state; and an essential part of the task of a free social order is to ensure space for institutions of resistance. Moreover, a state that attempts to improve the human condition should engage not in plans but in experiments, secure in the knowledge that people will adapt to those experiments in unanticipated ways. Scott offers no plans or rules here, and a closer analysis of the circumstances that distinguish success from failure would have produced greater illumination. But he has written a remarkably interesting book on social engineering, and he cannot be much faulted for failing to offer a sure-fire plan for the well-motivated, *metis*-friendly social engineer.

CASS R. SUNSTEIN's new book, *Judicial Minimalism: Court and Constitution at Century's End*, will be published by Harvard University Press next year.

All Mere Complexities

BY ADAM KIRSCH

Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse by Anne Carson

(Knopf, 149 pp., $23)

Anne Carson's poetry has the glow of important enterprise. She writes difficult, experimental verse at a time when the diction of poetry is determinedly flat and common. A classical scholar, she brings to her writing a knowledge of ancient Greek poetry, now practically an esoteric skill. Her last book, *Plainwater: Essays and Poetry*, which appeared in 1995, and her new one, *Autobiography of Red*, are conceived as books, at the grander level of a whole volume; Carson does not just collect poems, she tries to give each book an organic force. All these things have made her a prominent poet in the space of just a few years, winning praise and recognition from people who are hungry for challenging, intelligent poetry.

But Carson also presents a curious problem, because it is exactly her strengths that are most injurious to her verse. Carson's intelligence is at heart nonpoetic, even antipoetic. She enjoys ratiocination, information, the complexity of theory; but all of these things can wreak havoc in poetry, unless they are controlled, and put at the service of other goals. In fact, some of the best English poetry is devoid of these qualities. In choosing to allow them into poetry—or, more accurately, in choosing to redefine poetry so as to accommodate them—Carson moves very far from the lyric, and begins to write something that is halfway between a prose poem and a puzzle.

Actually, this tendency has been somewhat restrained in *Autobiography of Red*, Carson's fifth book, which aspires to the condition of narrative. (For this reason, it may disappoint admirers of her earlier work.) Here Carson's postmodernism—wordplay in the manner of Stein, intellectual games in the manner of Borges—is largely shunted into appendices. But these facets of Carson's work were front and center in *Plainwater*. One section of that book, entitled "The Life of Towns," was a series of squibs with opaque titles such as "Town of Uneven Love (But All Love Is Uneven)," "Town of the Death of Sin," "Pushkin Town," and even "Entgegenwärtigung Town." An extreme example of Carson's linguistic avant-gardism is "Town of My Farewell to You":

> Look what a thousand blue thousand
> white.
> Thousand blue thousand white thousand.
> Blue thousand white thousand blue
> thousand.
> White thousand blue wind today and
> two arms.
> Blowing down the road.

This is farther than Carson goes even in most of the "Town" poems, but it is nonetheless representative. A great deal is owed to Gertrude Stein, as we can see by comparing Stein's "A Valentine to Sherwood Anderson":

> Very fine is my valentine.
> Very fine and very mine.
> Very mine is my valentine very mine
> and very fine.
> Very fine is my valentine and mine,
> very fine very
> mine and mine is my valentine.

It is beside the point to say that this type of writing is nonsense. The statement being made is a theoretical one: Carson, like Stein, is emptying out language, foregrounding its artificiality. We do get a sense of "blowing down the road," of a tumbling motion, from her repetitions; and the fact that nonsense can convey this measure of sense is really the lesson of the poem.

Indeed, this is Carson's favorite technique: the aggressive assertion of nonsense so that it seems to conceal a deep and important meaning. *Plainwater* is rife with gnomic formulations, in poetry and prose: "Pilgrims were people who carried knives but rarely found use for them"; "Are you going to put that chair back where it belongs or just leave it there looking like a uterus?"; "Some words of yours are very probably ore there./Or will be by the time our eyes are ember." It is this aggressiveness that gives her work the appearance of challenge, of intellect hard at work.

T. S. Eliot once said that Gertrude Stein's poetry is "an extremely valuable exercise for unused parts of the mind," to which Mario Praz responded, "But is it not better to let those parts of the mind get entirely atrophied?" With Carson, too, one feels that one's mind is being exercised in a way that poetry usually does not demand. But Praz's impatience is also pertinent here; for there is a kind of mental exercise that ultimately does not repay one's effort, that substitutes for the hard work of sensibility the precocious play of calculation and decoding. At a time when poetry in general is far too easy, it is important not to be deceived by a poetry that is only trivially hard. Carson's writing, at its most characteristic, is deceptive in this way: it is exertion that seems like movement.

One feels the same disappointment with regard to Carson's expertise in the classics, one of the assets that sets her apart from most poets writing now. We saw that expertise at work in the section of *Plainwater* titled "Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings." The title itself is a riddle, which it is the reader's job to solve. Mimnermos was a Greek poet of the late seventh century BC, known now only through a handful of fragments. It is not a name that the educated person can be expected to recognize; even the reader who knows about, say, Pindar

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will probably balk at the mention of Mimnermos.

Then there's the subtitle. "Brainsex" sounds like it might be a town in Massachusetts, or possibly an English county; "paintings" suggests that we are dealing with visual art. In fact, "brainsex" is just Carson's coinage, expressing the idea of poetry as intellectual rapture; and "paintings" is purely arbitrary, a metaphor for poems. Thus Carson's sequence, though actually based on the fragments of a real Greek poet, is titled as if it were pure invention. This is a Borgesian game, a kind of knowing athleticism. Again, Carson is exercising our brains. It is brainsex without the sex.

And this riddling is very much a part of Carson's intent. Her description of her method appears in *Plainwater*:

> You can never know enough, never work enough, never use the infinitives and participles oddly enough, never impede the

Middle Distance

This is certain.

Dream has no friends.

Bottom is there but depth conceals it.

Centuries cannot see us.

Here, in liberty.

(enter others)

What are these eyes for?

What are these hands for?

I have been listening. A long time (looks around)

The "frontier labyrinth" (gestures)

All the people in history (gestures further)

The heart in my throat (spotlight on wilderness)

Then their eyes were opened and they knew and it vanished from sight.

This is certain.

Dream

will not vector

is illegitimate

hangs over us huge dry wings

suffers with us grows worse

is not identical with awareness

often lies under the cathedral floor

ought to spare us

oh surely it ought to spare us

entertaining brevity like a sweet curiosity

always the wings opening and closing at a
constant rate

as if nothing were happening

never beckoning or imploring why do we
stay

has a sharpness, is raven-dark,
perhaps weak eyesight

is humble is authentic

(though of course in the inaudible)

usually in bed at night the wings
tie down

you can hear them like a growing
of the dark

although all of it of course stays the same

(none of the letters have been saved)

This is certain: inwardgoingness of the
soul

that won't lie down

vague gods

no possible restoration of order

bright city held at the hinge of
the wings

remembered touch weary hands

flame snapping the air in

its one body of bright singularity

dust on the fire becoming fire

and how we shall be obedient

dust on the fire

on the seeming

apple in hand

in the wake of the wings

("speechless sorrowing of Nature")

(you will get lost you will be left)

bending over looking for the trinket lost

(most quiet heaven)

pale light of the reasons

soul walking in circles

weary scribe

Fly I say, reins in the one hand
you now
dislodging centuries
need me
by offering yours suddenly to free

Wheel without faces on it

Happened to be

JORIE GRAHAM

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movement harshly enough, never leave the mind quickly enough.

This is a defense of nonsense familiar from the Language poets: simply the act of confusing the reader is somehow valuable, since disorientation wipes out our customary complacency about language. It is also the fruit of the literary and linguistic theory of the last fifty years: if language is an arbitrary code—or worse, a system of secret domination—then sticking a monkey wrench in the gears of language is a kind of heroic sabotage. Oddity becomes valuable for its own sake. But oddity isn't always strangeness; often it is just idiosyncrasy, which is individuality at its most superficial.

In *Autobiography of Red*, Carson the saboteur coexists uneasily with Carson the storyteller. It is a "novel in verse," we are told, and this is just the kind of challenge that Carson would enjoy. The genre has something antique about it—we think of *Aurora Leigh*; but there is also something very contemporary, and very programmatic, about the implied mixing and confusing of forms. What kind of novel in verse might a postmodernist classicist disciple of Gertrude Stein write?

The answer is, a much less experimental one than might have been expected. *Autobiography of Red* is a coming-of-age story, told with emotional delicacy and power, but basically familiar in its outlines. It traces the development of its hero, Geryon, through childhood, first love, and artistic calling, very much in the manner of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Take out the line breaks and much of *Autobiography of Red* could pass for straight fiction, though of a pared-down, minimalist sort.

The meat of the book ("Believe me for meat and for myself," Carson writes, quoting Stein) lies in this story. When we first see him, Geryon is a child, and his life is difficult: school is a torment, his brother is a bully who (in an unspecified way) sexually abuses him. Carson renders his childish thought processes in simple, declarative sentences—again, with echoes of Stephen Dedalus—as in this passage, describing his attempt to find his way to his kindergarten classroom:

> He stood on his small red shadow
> and thought what to do next.
> Main Door rose before him. Perhaps—
> peering hard Geryon made his way
> through the fires in his mind to where
> the map should be.
> In place of a map the school corridor lay a
> deep glowing blank.
> Geryon's anger was total....
> After that Geryon went to school alone.

As we know intuitively from the first, the hero of the story is too sensitive for his surroundings, and will eventually become an artist: in this case, a photographer. This awakening, the crux of Carson's tale, comes when the 14-year-old Geryon falls in love with Herakles, a 16-year-old bad boy who is new in town. The description of the affair is also well-handled—we remain always one step ahead of the protagonist, seeing that he is more complex than his lover and will eventually be rejected for that reason. And the aftermath of the break-up is affecting:

> It was raining on his face. He forgot for
> a moment that he was a brokenheart
> then he remembered. Sick lurch
> downward to Geryon trapped in his own
> bad apple. Each morning a shock
> to return to the cut soul.

It is in such passages, when there is a human story to be told, that Carson achieves her best writing. "A brokenheart" and "his own bad apple" are funny-serious, like something out of Berryman; "the cut soul" is abrupt and apt. And there are small beauties such as these throughout: "a hoarse animal / spraying pain from the back of its throat"; "They were two superior eels/at the bottom of the tank." On this level, Carson's story is modest, moving, and successful.

The "novel" is recognizable, then. But what makes Carson think of *Autobiography of Red* as poetry? Not the verse, despite her subtitle. The writing is quite clearly prose, laid out in alternating long and short lines, with no strictness of measure or rhythm; the division between a long line and a short one is typographical only, or at best syntactic. In this, to be sure, Carson is writing free verse of a familiar sort—but a "novel in free verse" is too much like tennis with the net down.

Consider an example, chosen at random:

> He moved his eyes back to the *Fodor's Guide*.
> "Among
> the indigenous folk of Tierra del Fuego
> were the Yama which means as a noun
> 'people not animals' or as a verb
> 'to live, breathe, be happy, recover
> from sickness, become sane.' Joined as a
> suffix to the word for *hand*
> it denotes 'friendship.'"

There is no way to read this aloud in a rhythmically coherent way, a good test of whether something is verse. But in fact Carson has no intention of writing verse, as she revealed in an interview last year:

> There's a novel I've written that was all prose at first and very thick. Then I thought, "What if I break these lines up a bit? Maybe they'd move along more smartly." So now the novel's in verse.

This would be a scandalous admission in any time but our own, when "verse" is generally thought of as anything with an irregular margin that is not as well-written as prose.

What Carson takes from poetry, then, is not verse, but a sort of license for intellectual recreation, for mental game-playing. Studding the straightforward narrative, and in the book's whimsical introduction, appendices, and postlude, and above all in its mythical substructure, we find the sort of self-congratulatory artifice, verbal and theoretical, that is familiar from Carson's earlier work.

The most important instance of this is her use of myth. "Geryon" is a figure in some fragments of poetry by Stesichoros. Like Mimnermos, Stesichoros is an early Greek poet known to us mainly

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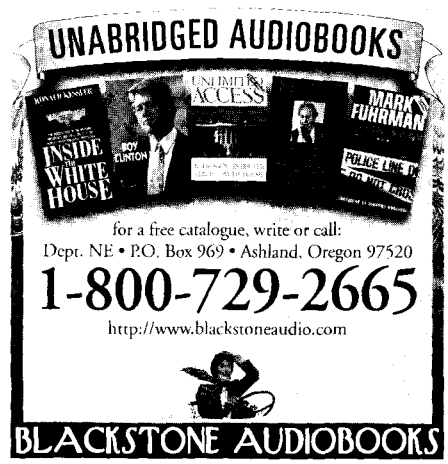

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through the legends and quotations attributed to him by later writers. Stesichoros is considered to have been the first poet to write in the strophe-antistrophe form, and the first to recite to the accompaniment of a lyre. (He invented and retold epic stories in this new lyric style, leading to the myth that he was the reincarnation of Homer.) Stesichoros serves Carson much as Mimnermos served her in *Plainwater*: as a real figure so obscure that he can be used as the scaffolding for her structure, the theme for her variations. His story of the red monster Geryon—the *Geryoneis*—survives only in fragments. As Carson puts it, with characteristic delight in arbitrariness, "the fragments of the *Geryoneis* itself read as if Stesichoros had composed a substantial narrative poem then ripped it to pieces and buried the pieces in a box with some song lyrics and lecture notes and scraps of meat."

Once we have been made privy to this background, several features of Carson's story gain added meaning. In Stesichoros, Herakles kills Geryon and steals his red cattle, as one of his labors; in Carson, Herakles breaks Geryon's heart and steals his innocence. In Stesichoros, Geryon is described as a red monster with wings; Carson gives her (functionally, if not explicitly) human hero wings as well, which are made to function as a symbol of his being marked, different. And the color red appears throughout as a sort of leitmotif for Geryon and his true nature, whence the title. In other words, Carson has worked up an analogue to the Greek myth, which is nonetheless an entirely realistic and self-sufficient narrative.

But it is exactly here, where Carson's accomplishment seems most ingenious, that it must be most carefully examined. For, just as with the sibylline obscurity of the "Town" poems and the riddle of "Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings," what she has done is less than meets the eye. In fact, Stesichoros is completely unnecessary for *Autobiography of Red*. Neither the verse nor the emotional tenor of the story is affected by his presence in any way. Carson introduces him merely so that we may have the pleasure of discovering him. And this kind of pleasure is unproductive: it refers almost exclusively to itself, it leads to no more significant attainment of art or understanding.

Whenever Carson ventures away from the realistic narrative and attempts a fanciful, "poetic" effect, we find the same essential idleness. Take, for example, an episode from the middle of the book, in which Geryon, now in his twenties and still deeply scarred by the affair with Herakles, has traveled to Argentina on a journey of self-discovery. The chapter is called "Mitwelt":

> There is no person without a world.
>
> The red monster sat at a corner table of Café Mitwelt writing bits of Heidegger on the postcards he'd bought.
>
> *Sie sind das was betreiben*
> there are many Germans in
> Buenos Aires they are all
> soccer players the weather
> is lovely wish you were here
> GERYON

Again, Carson is sporting with meanings. *Mitwelt* (literally "with-world") is a philosophical term from Heidegger, and its meaning is paraphrased in the first line—more or less, that every person always finds himself already embedded in his world. But now Carson turns "Mitwelt" into the name of a café in Buenos Aires, where Geryon sits writing postcards, in which he quotes Heidegger and makes jokes about Germans. If we get the allusion in the title, we are gratified by the first line; and then we are even more gratified to find Carson's hint about Heidegger in the second line. The naïve reader (or the ordinary reader, who is made to feel naïve) sees only isolated, confusing clues. The more sophisticated reader sees a larger pattern.

But what pattern is here, really? The episode goes on, with Geryon writing more postcards and quoting more Heidegger. Then the waiter approaches him, and in confusion he jumps up, forgets his Spanish, and blunders out of the café. He finds himself on the street, remembering a scene from childhood:

> It was the year he began to wonder about
> the noise that colors make. Roses came
> roaring across the garden at him.
> He lay on his bed at night listening to the
> silver light of stars crashing against
> the window screen. Most
> of those he interviewed for the science
> project had to admit they did not hear
> the cries of the roses
> being burned alive in the noonday sun.

Finally, Geryon moves "off into the tragicomedy of the crowd," and the chapter ends. There is no following up on the allusions to Heidegger at the beginning; nothing more about the potentially interesting idea of the "mitwelt." When Carson progresses to her real subject, to the childhood memory, Heidegger is dropped, and instead we get a sentimental episode featuring a familiar conceit (colors as sounds). So Carson has not used Heidegger, she has abused him. The reference is there solely in order to see if we pick it up. Such esotericism is finally a tactic of ingratiation, a way of flattering the reader for being in on things.

This is not to say, of course, that arcane references and complex allusions are inherently unsuited to poetry. In this century especially, some of the best poets have used those tools to excellent effect. In *History*, for instance, Robert Lowell cast his net of reference wide. He found employment for Joinville and Louis IX, for Bishop Berkeley and the battle of Killiecrankie—all of them, if anything, more obscure to the contemporary reader than Carson's Heidegger.

The problem, then, lies not in the reaching for the extrinsic services of reference, but in its method and its objective. For Lowell, historical and philosophical allusions are the very medium of his thought; he thinks through and in his examples, thus demonstrating in practice a coherent, and characteristically modern, attitude toward the past. He applies to each subject and personage his own voice and his own habit of mind, and the stain of a single personality emerges in the whole.

For Carson, by contrast, the reference to Heidegger, and to Stesichoros, and to Greek mythology, are not integral; they are showy, deliberately exterior to the main enterprise. They are ostentatiously announced and then simply left behind; any or all of them could be dropped without significantly damaging the Geryon narrative. Their purpose, then, is only to call attention to themselves; and it is the sterility of this learning, not the learning itself, that is injurious to poetry, and gives Carson's allusions a stale air of pedantry and puzzle.

This puzzle aspect is especially evident in the opening sections of the volume, before the story proper begins. Carson starts by giving some background information about Stesichoros and the Geryoneis, in a section titled "Red Meat: What Difference Did Stesichoros Make?" ("He came after Homer and before Gertrude Stein, a difficult interval for a poet.") Then she translates the fragments of Stesichoros, leaving any Greekness they might have had far behind:

> Well Goodnight Then they said and drove
> him up
> Those hemorrhaging stairs to the hot dry
> Arms
> To the ticking red taxi of the incubus....

Finally there is a series of three appendices, in which Carson plays with the legend of Stesichoros's blinding by Helen of Troy. According to this story, told by Plato in the *Phaedrus*, the poet wrote some verses insulting to Helen, for which she blinded him; to regain his sight, he composed an apologetic palinode. Carson writes a mock-logical proof

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on the question:

1. Either Stesichoros was a blind man or he was not.

2. If Stesichoros was a blind man either his blindness was a temporary condition or it was permanent.

3. If Stesichoros' blindness was a temporary condition this condition either had a contingent cause or it had none.

And so on for 21 propositions, ending in outright nonsense: "If Stesichoros was a blind man either we will lie or if not not."

Such divagations have nothing at all to do with the story that follows: they are self-enclosed mazes for the mind. These propositions, like the mythical references, like the Heidegger episode, like the random chunks of data that Carson is fond of inserting into her text ("Lava can move as slow as / nine hours per inch./ Color and fluidity vary with its temperature from dark red and hard / (below 1,800 degrees centigrade) / to brilliant yellow and completely fluid (above 1,950 degrees centigrade)."), are precisely what Praz warned against. They are like Escher drawings: one leaves them with a sense of having labored much and gained nothing. A genuine exercise of art is not calisthenic, or essentially gratuitous.

Carson's complexities, then, which are clearly the elements meant to raise this story from prose into poetry, are not really difficult in any true or important way. Obscurity can be integral and necessary in poetry—in order to express an especially elusive feeling (as in Dickinson), or in order to coax forth a new music from words (as in Hopkins), a poet may be required to be difficult—but when the intellect creates problems for their own sake, difficulty becomes just a pastime. And it is possible that this gamelike quality is what has attracted many people to Carson's writing.

The ease at the heart of Carson's difficulty is made clear in another way, as well. For at the same time that she elevates the trivial, Carson degrades what is truly significant in poetry. We see this most clearly in the gassiness and the pretention of her aphorisms. Aphorisms in poetry can be the summings-up of experience, the compression of truth into significant tokens: "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard/Are sweeter"; "The best lack all conviction, while the worst/Are full of passionate intensity"; "By our own spirits are we deified." These formulations take what is closest to us and, through the intense pressure of language, make us notice it again. Carson, too, strives for such summings-up; they are the most abstract and vaunting moments in this prosy narrative. But the habit of idle mystification infects her grand gestures:

> "How does distance look?" is a simple
> direct question. It extends from a
> spaceless
> within to the edge
> of what can be loved. It depends on light.
>
> ...if
> there were such a thing
> as justice that's what it ought to look like—
> short. Clean. Rhythmical.
>
> We are amazing beings.
> Geryon is thinking. We are neighbors
> of fire.

After being difficult for the sake of difficulty, Carson approaches the truly hard subjects with a facile sentimentality. Should justice be "short, clean, rhythmical"? Shouldn't justice in fact be painstaking? Carson's formulation disappears like a mirage when one focuses on it; but while it lasts it envelops us in good feeling, in the pillows of profundity.

And this, at bottom, is the problem with *Autobiography of Red.* On the level of both language and allusion, Carson offers complication in the place of complexity. The remarkable coexistence, in this book, of a direct, sentimental plot and an ornate network of mythical and other allusions is evidence of a bifurcated sensibility: Carson neither feels her thoughts nor thinks her feelings. Yet it is the role of poetry to bring those two halves of experience together, a fusion which is made possible by translating moments of being into musical patterns of words. Lacking a commitment to the rigor of such patterns—a commitment to verse—Carson attains neither poetry's music nor poetry's wisdom. •

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 5*

column. Much as we'd like to get our hands on some government grants, per Lane's suggestions, our students are doing just fine without them.

ARI R. FREISER
Director, TestWell
Brookline, Massachusetts

To the editors:

Charles Lane explains that the troubling differences in black and white average LSAT scores are a result of unequal access to commercial test-prep courses. While this theory is tempting, the evidence does not support it.

Citing a recent *Wall Street Journal* article, Lane asserts that significantly more whites than blacks take commercial test-prep courses and that this accounts for at least some of the gap in LSAT scores. Unfortunately, the statistics cited by the *Wall Street Journal* were drawn from a single administration of the LSAT (June 1990) and are not reflective of more recent and comprehensive data.

According to a recent report published by the Law School Admission Council, which produces and administers the LSAT, fully 28 percent of black LSAT-takers report having attended a commercial test-preparation school compared to 31 percent of whites during the 1996–1997 academic year. The resulting three percent difference is hardly adequate to explain the nagging difference in black and white LSAT scores.

Perhaps even more revealing is a comparison of test performance by those who engaged in different preparation methods. The report shows that the average LSAT score of commercial test-prep-course users was less than one point higher than nonusers.

PHILIP D. SHELTON
President and Executive Director
Law School Admission Council
Newtown, Pennsylvania

Union forever

To the editors:

Harold Meyerson's comparison of union spending with the NRA or Christian Coalition is disingenuous ("Union Bust," April 13). To the best of my knowledge, no one is required to belong to these organizations as a condition of employment.

The size of the individual contribution is irrelevant. I suspect that, if Meyerson found a portion of his paycheck "so small as to be symbolic" allocated to Newt Gingrich's campaign, we would soon see a Supreme Court case styled *Meyerson* v. *Whomever.*

JIM RYAN
San Angelo, Texas

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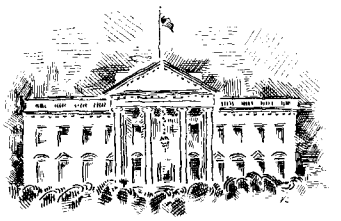
WASHINGTON DIARIST

On the pill

TECHNOLOGY IS MY NEW FRIEND. No, I don't mean the protease inhibitors, God bless them. Of all the unique experiences of pre-millennial America, few are as disorienting, or as exhilarating, as going into your 30s and growing your hair back. No, I'm not delusional. I started taking Merck's Propecia pill three months ago, about six hours and 15 minutes after it came out on the market. Yes, I knew it could conceivably make me impotent, but a loss of sex drive was something, I figured, I could live with during Lent. But nothing prepared me for the astonishing growth that has subsequently ensued. I'm not quite Alec Baldwin yet, but the fuzz is definitely solidifying. Yesterday, I worried about "hat hair" for the first time in four years. My workout partner, who gazes on my pate more often than anyone else, has grown accustomed to calling me "Chia."

WHICH LEADS ME TO MY OWN VERsion of E.O. Wilson's consilience theory. In trying to figure out why the economy keeps growing, and Bill Clinton's popularity keeps rising, has anyone thought of pharmaceuticals? The growth rate got its second wind in the mid-'90s just when the Prozac-style drugs were coming on the market. These wonder-pills, which are now among the most prescribed medications in America, have been proven to alleviate low-level depression, stimulate a sprightly interest in life, and generally boost your personal productivity. Forget the microchip. The productivity boom is surely related to this. The new AIDS drugs have also steered a third of a million people back into the job market, where they might once have expected to spend the rest of their lives on disability. Propecia will shortly effect a self-esteem revolution among millions of follically challenged men. And now there's Viagra, which, while aggravating road rage, will also put a smile on the face of countless men (and maybe even some women) in the office in the morning. No wonder everyone is working harder, forgiving the president, and talking about a new economy. It *is* new. This is America on drugs.

I TAKE THE ANCIENT AND REVERED TNR line that almost all "peace breakthroughs" are neither, but even my rock-ribbed skepticism was shaken by the Good Friday deal in Northern Ireland. It's not, of course, a completely new idea, this hodgepodge of representative institutions designed to share power between everybody and his uncle. Back in 1973, the memorable Sunningdale agreement also envisaged a new parliament, with power-sharing guarantees between the two communities. It fell apart as ferocious Unionist opposition destroyed the tenuous modus vivendi and as the IRA regrouped. It could easily happen again. But the real fallacy of the agreement, I think, is the notion that more talking between the parties will inevitably lead to greater understanding. Maybe this works in Wisconsin, but in Belfast? In my own family, which included people from north and south of the border, most political discussions led to bursts of emotional protest, door-slammings, and long-held grudges. And we were all Catholics! My own bet is that the Stormont parliament may well lead to a similar outcome. This, after all, is not a roundtable at the Renaissance Weekend. If it were a talk show, it would be less Oprah than Jerry Springer. Except the grievances wouldn't be made up.



I REALIZED THE OTHER DAY THAT I haven't bought a book in a bookstore for the better part of a year. When the Web got off the ground a couple of years ago, I was an early doubter, but now I'm completely hooked. Amazon.com helped. The handfuls of carpers are, I think, grasping at straws. What clinched it for me was the realization that the new technology is in fact quite retro in its effects. It has the potential to encourage the purchase of books by real readers on the basis of content—a radical concept in contemporary book publishing. As any publishing insider can attest, the big book stores these days are essentially real estate businesses. They rent their premium space—windows, display units, cappuccino shelves—to publishing companies. Those companies are under acute pressure to move books quickly in order to keep a hold on the real estate. So book launches have become increasingly like movie launches. The first impact is vital, or the book is yanked and pulped. Hence the premium on marketing and publicity and the dominance of sequels, celebrities, and trash. What the Web does is devolve, slow down, and democratize the entire process. There's no real front window and no time limit on shelf space. The real estate is endless. So, suddenly, a book can take time to get known, be read, appreciated, and discovered. And it's not subject to being returned in bulk the minute a downward tremor in its sales prompts a panic at Borders. It's also democratic, in the most elevated sense of that word. At Amazon.com, Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* takes up as much space, and has as much exposure, as *Diana: Her True Story*. Browsing is wonderful. Previous buyers leave their comments and electronic fingerprints behind. If you like a book, Amazon lets you see what other books the purchasers of your favorite have also bought. Sure, you don't get the feel of a book under your hands, or the thrill of flipping through its pages or scanning the index and acknowledgments. But you do get the delicious wait of a couple of days before the package arrives on your doorstep, and you snip open the binding to see the glossy freshness of the cover and the crisp whiteness within. It's like ordering a book from the mother of all Wideners—only it's brand new, and you get to keep it forever. What's not to love?

A PICTURE ON THE FRONT PAGE OF *The New York Times* the other day has stuck with me. It was of Bill Clinton viewing tornado damage in Alabama. A typical photo-op, you might think, and obviously staged, as the *Times*' James Bennet tartly pointed out. An elderly and slightly overweight African American couple are standing with the president, gazing at the wreckage of what had once been their home. It's a standard, if moving, photo-portrait. But then you catch a tiny detail. The Alabaman's thick hand is resting on the president's waist, his arm casually cradling Clinton's back. And you think: Can you imagine any other recent president evoking that kind of familiarity and comfort from an ordinary citizen? And from an African American? I suppose part of the anger many of us still feel toward Clinton stems from a sense of the potential the man obviously once had and the tawdry series of betrayals, compromises, and schmoozathons he has subsequently embraced. It's almost as if the "boxes" into which he has had to compartmentalize his entire, duplicitous life have made it impossible for him to connect empathy with principle, warmth with direction. They just occupy different parts of his brain. So we are left with the amorphous, lucky drift of the last few years and the memory of that gentle moment in Alabama. I guess we're lucky we had at least one out of the two.

ANDREW SULLIVAN

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AMNIO TO GENOME

Research on genetic diseases – notably many diseases of childhood – is entering an exciting, promising new phase. As scientists intensify the process of deciphering the secrets of the human genetic blueprint, their findings yield critical new clues to the development of genetic diseases and to the search for new therapies. ❧ The figures are staggering: deciphering the blueprint means the ultimate sequencing of 3,000,000,000 letters of the human genetic code. Genetic diseases number about 5,000. ❧ The Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, Israel, takes pride in its commitment to both these research challenges. Years ago, discoveries in a Weizmann laboratory led to the first uses of amniocentesis to examine the fetus and diagnose hereditary illnesses. Among current projects on the Weizmann agenda are studies of fundamental embryonic development, Down syndrome, low birth weight, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, insulin substitutes and vaccinations against juvenile diabetes. The establishment of the Bioinformatics Genome Research Center on the Weizmann campus underscores the growing contributions of Institute scientists to the World Human Genome Project. ❧ It's another example of how support for basic scientific research yields practical benefits previously beyond reach.

The Weizmann Institute, founded in 1934, is a community of 2,400 scientists, engineers and scientists-in-training engaged in a full agenda of 1,000 research projects ranging from basic medical diseases to chemistry, physics, agriculture, computer science and the environment, research in cancer, AIDS, neurosciences and children's

AMERICAN COMMITTEE FOR THE WEIZMANN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE
51 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10010 212/779-2500
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